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# IDYLLS OF THE KING



by TENNYSON

*Edited by Arthur Beatty*

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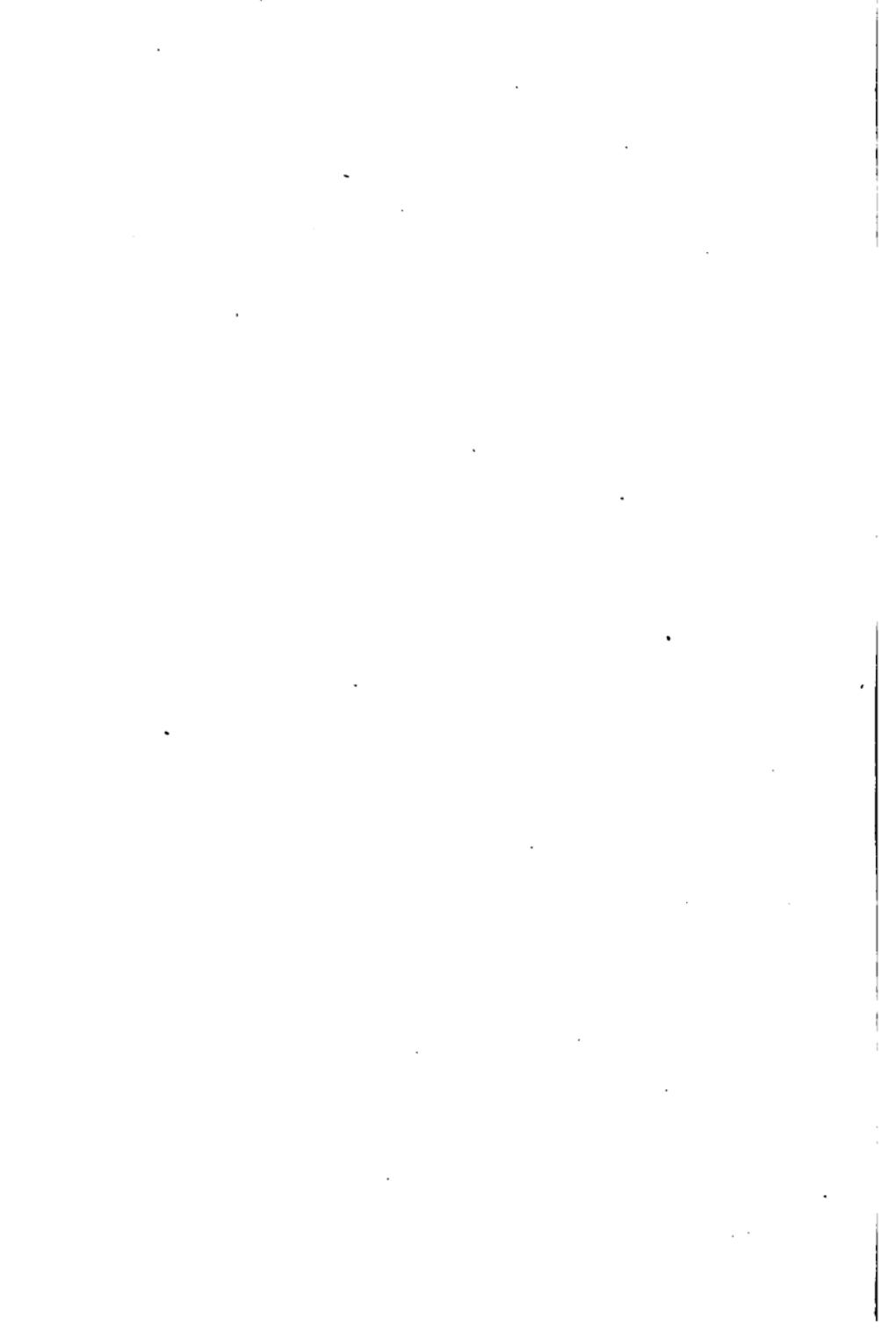
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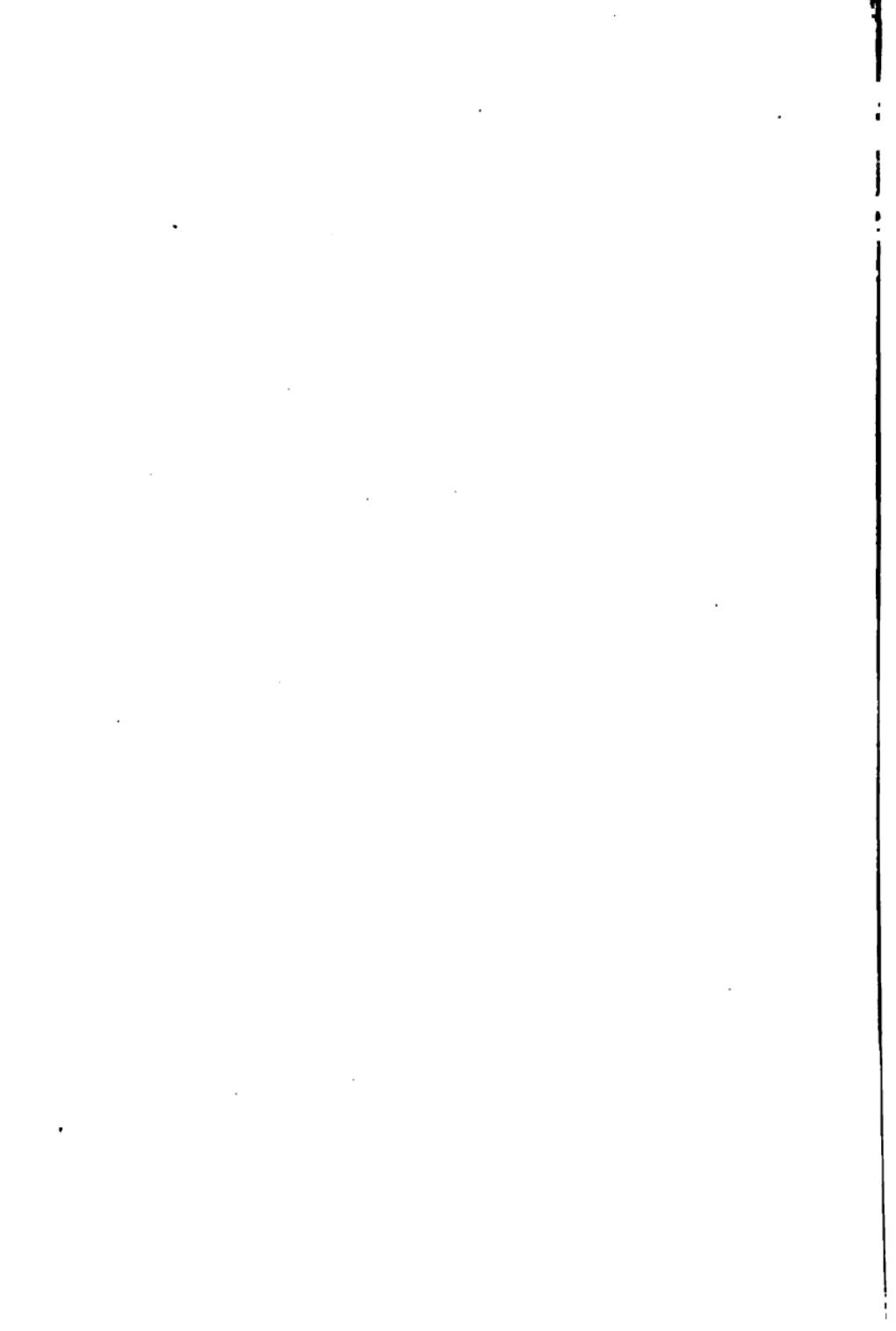
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TENNYSON

1809-1892

**Heath's English Classics**

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**TENNYSON'S  
IDYLLS OF THE KING  
(SELECTIONS)**

**EDITED, WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES**

**BY**

**ARTHUR BEATTY, PH.D.**

**INSTRUCTOR IN ENGLISH IN THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN**

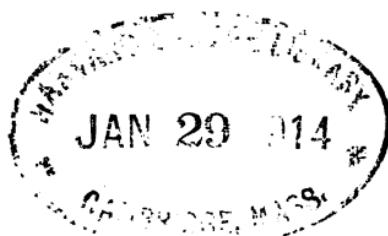
**"I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
May He within himself make pure!"**

**BOSTON, U.S.A.**

**D. C. HEATH & CO., PUBLISHERS**

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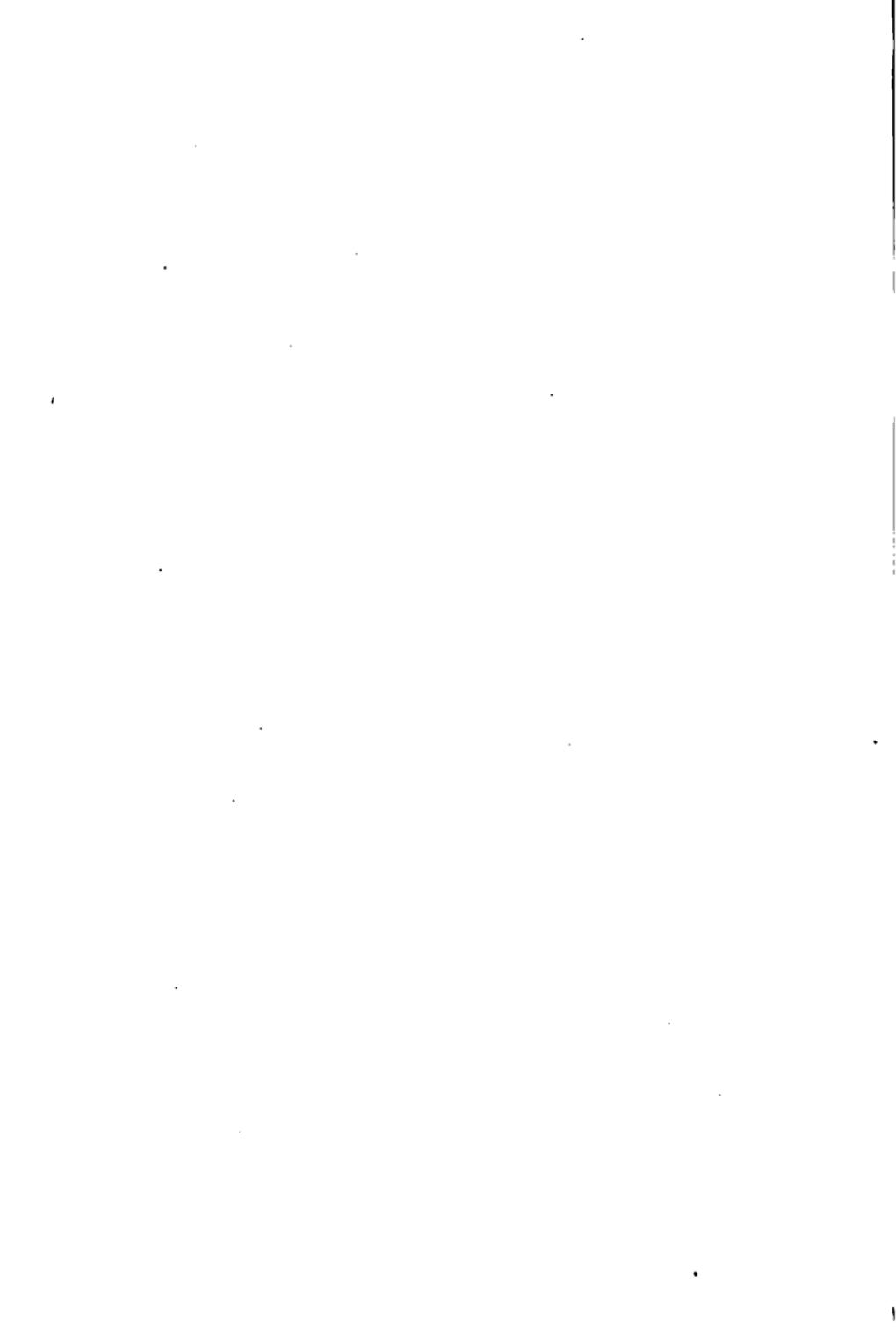
## TO THE TEACHER

FOR the study of the *Idylls of the King* little direct help is to be obtained from the biography of the poet. For this reason the Editor has given only the most important dates in Tennyson's life, with special reference to the *Idylls*. The teacher who wishes a more extended biography can find it in the first three works mentioned in the List of Books (p. xxxiv). It has been the effort of the Editor to make the *Idylls* explain themselves; and in order to permit of this, it is necessary for the pupil to make himself familiar with the story of the Idylls, given on pages xiv-xxvi of the Introduction. In addition, the class ought to study carefully *The Coming of Arthur*, with the notes; as this poem, together with a knowledge of the story of the Idylls as a whole, forms the best possible introduction to the three Idylls that are prescribed for particular study.

The form of verse is an important matter, and should not be overlooked in any reading of the *Idylls*. On pages xxviii-xxxiii a brief account is given of some of the most important features of the verse; but the task of making such an analysis intelligible to the student must rest upon the teacher. This task can be accomplished only by persistent, sympathetic vocal interpretation on the part of the teacher, with equal encouragement to the student to do likewise. What Byron has said of Horace may equally well be said of Tennyson,

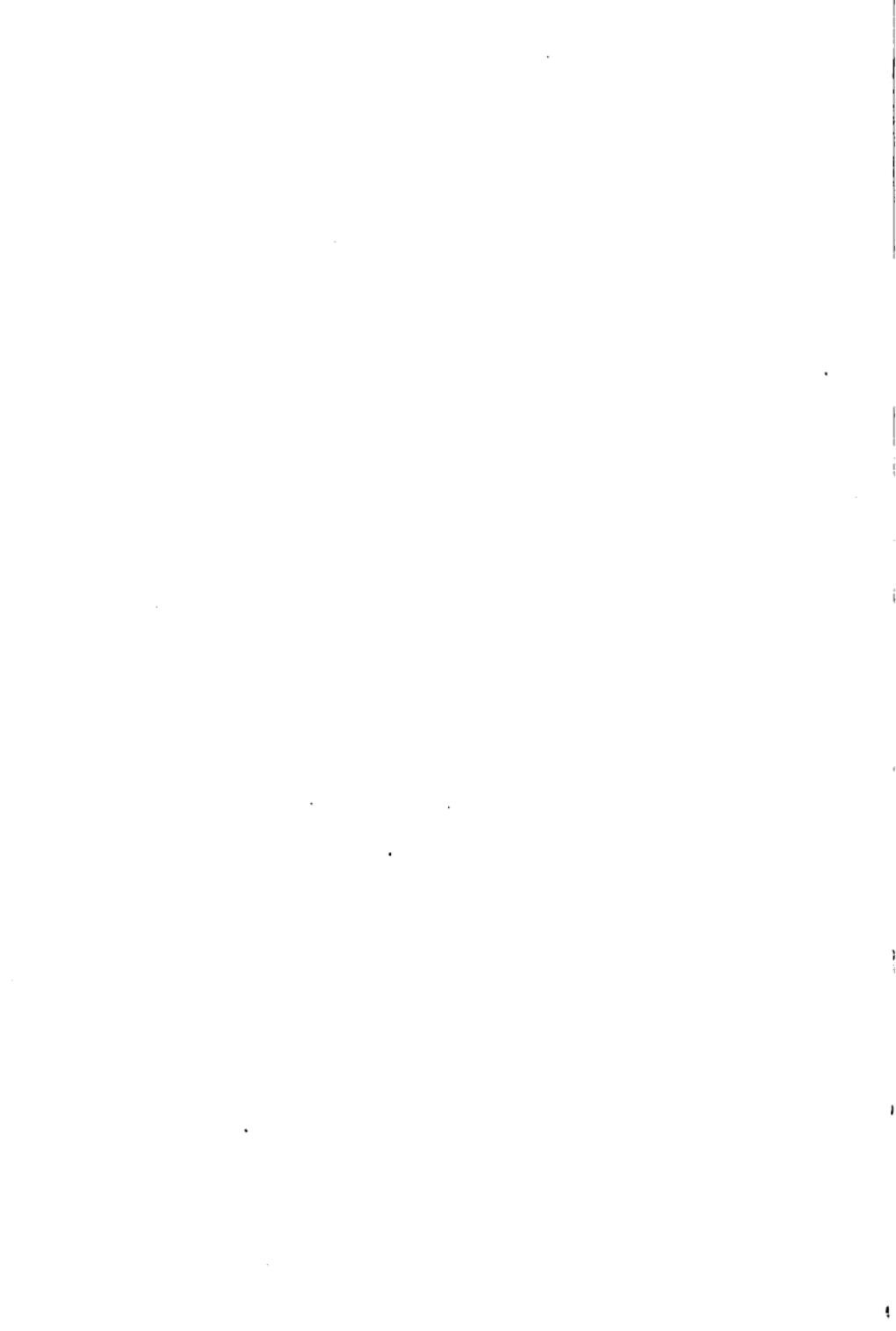
"—it is a curse  
To understand, not feel thy lyric flow,  
To comprehend, but never love thy verse."

Constant reference to the map will help to give concreteness to the pupil's conception of the *Idylls*. It must be remembered, however, that the geography is exceedingly vague, and some of the places cannot be even approximately located. They are in the region of pure romance.



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## OUTLINE OF TENNYSON'S BIOGRAPHY

- 1809, Aug. 6 Alfred Tennyson was born at Somersby, a country village in Lincolnshire, the fourth son in a family of twelve children. His father, Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, was the rector of Somersby and West Enderby, and was a scholar and poet.
- 1816 At the age of seven Alfred, with his elder brother Charles, went to the Louth Grammar School, under "a tempestuous, flogging master of the old stamp." He was brutally used by the boys at first, and spent four unhappy years here.
- 1820 He then returned home, and studied under his father's direction. Besides studying Greek and Latin, he and his brothers Frederick and Charles read a large number of good books in English literature, and composed many poems.
- 1827 The first public sign of this verse-writing was the publication at Louth of a volume called *Poems by Two Brothers*. The present Lord Tennyson says that the poems were really written by the three brothers, Frederick, Charles, and Alfred.
- 1828, Feb. 20 He and his brother Charles went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where Frederick was already a student.
- 1829, June 6 He won the Chancellor's medal for his poem in blank verse, *Timbuctoo*. At this time he met Arthur Henry Hallam, with whom he formed a warm friendship, and whose early death was to inspire Tennyson's great poem, *In Memoriam*.
- 1830 He published his first independent volume of verse, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*.
- 1831 He left Cambridge without taking a degree, on account of the death of his father. He now became the manager of the household, and remained at home, diligently educating himself to be a poet.

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- 1832 His next volume was published, and was entitled *Poems*.
- 1833 Arthur Hallam, who had gone to the Continent for his health, died at Vienna.
- 1842 In this year he published *Poems*, in two volumes, a work which contained most of what he had published in the volumes of 1830 and 1832, rewritten and improved, together with much that was new. These volumes included many of those poems which are now regarded as the poet's best work, such as *Locksley Hall*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, and *Ulysses*. It must be specially noted that they also contained the *Morte d'Arthur*, which now forms lines 170-440 of the present *Passing of Arthur*, the closing book of the *Idylls of the King*. This year, therefore, marks the beginning of the *Idylls*. They were not finished until 1885.
- 1847 *The Princess* was next published.
- 1850 Ever since the death of Arthur Hallam, Tennyson had been composing a series of poems which were inspired by his love for his friend. The result was *In Memoriam*, published in this year.  
His poems now began to bring him fame, and he was appointed Poet Laureate. They were bringing him an income as well, and he was now enabled to marry Emily Sellwood.
- 1855 *Maud, and Other Poems* was published.
- 1859 *The Idylls of the King* was published in the earliest form. There were four Idylls in this volume, Enid, Vivien, Elaine, and Guinevere.
- 1864 *Enoch Arden, and Other Poems*.
- 1869 *The Holy Grail, and Other Poems*.
- 1871 *The Last Tournament*.
- 1872 *Gareth and Lynette, and Other Poems*.  
These three Idylls took their proper place in the new edition of the *Idylls of the King*, 1872.
- 1875 *Queen Mary, A Drama*.
- 1876 *Harold, A Drama*.
- 1884 *Becket*.  
These are his three great historical dramas.

## OUTLINE OF TENNYSON'S BIOGRAPHY ix

- 1884 The poet was made Baron of Aldworth and Farringford.
- 1885 *Tiresias and Other Poems.* The volume contains *Balin and Balan*, the latest written of all the *Idylls of the King. Ballads, and Other Poems.*
- 1886 *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, etc.*
- 1889 *Demeter, and Other Poems.*
- 1892 Tennyson died October 6, and was buried October 12, in Westminster Abbey, beside Robert Browning, in front of Chaucer's tomb.  
*The Death of Ænone, Akbar's Dream, and Other Poems,* published October 24.

## TENNYSON AND THE IDYLLS OF THE KING

In the Life of Tennyson, written by his son, we read that, from his earliest years, the poet had written out in prose various histories of King Arthur. His earliest poem on the subject appeared in 1832, when he published *The Lady of Shalott*, which is another form of *Lancelot and Elaine* in the *Idylls of the King*. The next poems on the Arthurian theme appeared just ten years later, in the volumes of 1842—*Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* (partly, if not wholly, written in 1830), *Sir Galahad*, and *Morte d'Arthur*.

Of these the first two are lyrical in form; but the last is in blank verse, and marks the real beginning of the *Idylls of the King*. The poet, then, had written a poem on this subject, at least as early as 1830, and we know that the last one in the Idylls (*Balin and Balan*) was published in 1885, so that the Arthur story occupied a large share of Tennyson's attention for a period of fifty-five years. The outline of Tennyson's Biography (pp. vii-ix) gives the date at which each of the books was published. A glance at this succession of dates will show us how important a place the *Idylls of the King* occupied in the life work of the poet. He studied the old books about Arthur, travelled in Wales, Brittany, and other places associated with the name of the famous King, and endeavored, in every way, to make himself familiar with what he called "the greatest of all poetical subjects."

The story is, indeed, one of the greatest stories of the world, and one that has attracted more than one eminent English poet. Spenser (1552-1599), in his greatest poem, the *Faerie Queene*, used the story of King Arthur to portray "the image of a brave knight perfected in the twelve private moral virtues." We know that Milton, too (1608-1674), about half a century later, planned to write a poem on King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, but he abandoned this subject for that of "Paradise Lost." Tennyson was the next famous poet who was especially attracted by the story, and the results of his interest are to be found at their best in this volume of selections from the *Idylls of the King*.

## THE ARTHUR LEGEND

William of Malmesbury, an early English historian, writing in 1125, informs us that the Britons of his time were in the habit of telling a series of tales about King Arthur, who had been the champion of the Celtic peoples against their enemies, and who was to come again and reign over them. These tales were connected with the struggles of the Britons in Cornwall and Wales against the Saxons who invaded Britain in 449 and finally conquered the island; but we have no reason to suppose that these stories were in any sense true to authentic history in their details. Indeed, we may be pretty certain that they were not, if we are to judge by the earliest elaborate account of the legendary history of Britain, written about 1136 by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *British History*. Geoffrey professes to obtain his information from an ancient British chronicle, which his friend, Walter of Oxford, brought from Brittany; but this is probably only a device of the author to render his own inventions plausible.

In Geoffrey's day there was a great revival of stories about King Arthur. The Saxons, the old hereditary foes of the Britons in Wales, had been defeated by the Normans under William the Conqueror in 1066, and the wild dreams of the Britons concerning the great King Arthur who was to come again were spread abroad in village and court. These tales Geoffrey must

have heard, and no doubt he made use of them, together with the writings of previous historians.

The result was a purely legendary history, in which the Arthur story was given a form somewhat similar to that which we find in Tennyson. In Geoffrey's version, Arthur is no longer represented as a mere prince of Wales or Cornwall, as he was in the earlier histories, but as king of Britain. He drives the Saxons from Northumbria, and finally, with the help of Hoel of Brittany, defeats all his enemies, at the battle of Mount Badon, or Badon Hill. This leaves Arthur absolute lord of the island of Britain, and he begins a career of foreign conquest. Ireland, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, and Gaul are brought into subjection to his rule, and he is about to conquer Rome, when he is recalled to his own land by news that his nephew Modred has been unfaithful to him. He returns, is wounded in the battle against Modred, and is carried to Avalon<sup>1</sup> to be healed. This is plainly a foreshadowing of the account in Tennyson.

The *History* of Geoffrey was very popular, and was translated into French by one Wace, about 1155. As a result, in part, of this translation, the story of Arthur spread through Europe; and during the twelfth century many romances appeared on the subject of Arthur and his knights.

Meanwhile, the Crusades had developed ideas of knightly honor and chivalry, and these elements were added to the Arthur story, until the legend became a story of chivalry, told in many forms by very many

<sup>1</sup> In the *Idylls*, Tennyson uses the other form of the name, Avilion.

writers during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, and making up a great mass of romance.

The Church, too, took up the story and made the theme its own by adding the account of the quest of the Holy Grail, which gives a distinctly Christian coloring to the whole legend.

Such was the condition of the story when the Englishman, Sir Thomas Malory, wrote his book, *Morte d'Arthur*, in 1469–1470. Malory was a knight with high ideals of chivalry and Christian duty, and in these stories of Arthur he found his ideals reflected. Accordingly, he made use of the romantic tales of Arthur and his knights in the writing of his own book; and he told the story in such a way that the book was at once received with favor, and was printed by Caxton, the first English printer, in 1485. In the preface to the book Caxton says :

“I . . . have down set it in print, to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all . . . that shall see and read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same.”

The beauty of the style, as well as the charm of the stories of knightly deeds, has made this book a classic in our language. It has been read by many generations of English-speaking people, and has exercised a profound effect on its readers by opening up to them a whole world of romance and poetry.

This was the book that furnished Tennyson with most of his material for the *Idylls of the King*; and we pay the highest tribute to the poet when we say that he is even greater than his original. Only a poet of unusual genius could have made use of Malory's book without suffering by comparison with him.<sup>1</sup>

### THE STORY OF THE IDYLLS OF THE KING

A brief outline, Idyll by Idyll, of the story as Tennyson tells it will show in some degree how great a story it is. The student should make himself familiar with this sketch, in order to appreciate the place occupied in the series by the Idylls which he reads.

Tennyson's epic story of Arthur consists of, (1) A Dedication to Prince Albert; (2) An Epilogue to the Queen, in which he explains that the *Idylls* shadow "sense at war with soul"; and (3) The Idylls, in three parts: I, *The Coming of Arthur*; II, *The Round Table*, in ten Idylls; and, III, *The Passing of Arthur*.

I. *The Coming of Arthur*. Arthur, the divinely appointed king of Britain, had fought against the invading Saxons and overcome them, and had united all the petty Celtic princedoms under him. Then, as the Celtic king of Britain, he formed his Order of the Round Table; and all his knights were sworn to vows of purity and love and truth —

"To reverence the King, as if he were  
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson found the original of *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*, not in Malory, but in *The Mabinogion*, a Welsh collection of stories, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in 1838.

To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,  
 To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,  
 To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,  
 To honor his own word as if his God's,  
 To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,  
 To love one maiden only, cleave to her,  
 And worship her by years of noble deeds,  
 Until they won her."

— *Guinevere, 465-474.*

Then came a call to him for help. Leodogran,<sup>1</sup> the king of Cameliard<sup>2</sup> (probably Scotland), oppressed by wild beasts and beset by his enemies, was in the sorest need, and as King Arthur's fame had gone over all the country, Leodogran appealed to him for aid. King Arthur responded promptly to the call, slew the beast, drove out the enemies, and then hastened home to put down a rebellion in his own land.

But while Arthur was giving Leodogran aid he saw the King's daughter, Guinevere,<sup>3</sup> and he loved her and desired to make her his queen. He therefore sent messengers asking for the hand of Guinevere. But Leodogran hesitated, for he had heard that Arthur was not the son of the former King, Uther<sup>4</sup> Pendragon, and so was no true king. He therefore had inquiry made, in order to find out the truth. He learned two different stories of Arthur's birth — first, that he was unquestionably King Uther's son; and secondly, that he had been miraculously brought to the sage, Merlin, on a flaming wave of the sea, and should return thither, in accordance with the old prophecy —

“From the great deep to the great deep he goes.”

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Leō'dogrān.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced Käm'eliard.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced Guin'ēvēre.

<sup>4</sup> Pronounced Ū'ther.

So the mystery of Arthur's birth was not cleared up, and Leodoran was in doubt. But a vision of Arthur crowned in heaven came to him, and he gave his consent to the marriage.

Then King Arthur sent his warrior Lancelot,<sup>1</sup> whom he loved and honored most, to Cameliard to bring his bride. It was in the springtime of the year, and as Lancelot and Guinevere travelled among the flowers they came to love each other. But neither one spoke of the love between them ; and Arthur was wedded to Guinevere with the blessing of Dubric, the head of the church in Britain.

So the King lived in glory at Camelot, and he and his Knights of the Round Table fought against Roman and Saxon, winning the victory over his enemies in the great battle of Badon Hill. Thus he made a realm and reigned.

II. *The Round Table.* Now begin the ten stories concerning the Knights of the Round Table ; and the first is of Gareth, the faithful, courteous knight.

1. *Gareth and Lynette.*<sup>2</sup> Years had passed since the marriage of King Arthur, when one day there appeared at Camelot on the royal mount the youth, Gareth, who had heard of the King's fame and glory. He came, desiring to be made a knight ; and so eager was he to serve the King, that in obedience to a vow he had made to his mother before leaving her, he was willing to serve in the royal kitchen for a twelvemonth and a day without telling his name to any one. So he became a kitchen-knave, but his mother after a month

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Län'selöt.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced Gă'reth and Lin-ĕt'.

released him from his vow. He was secretly made a knight of Arthur's Round Table, and no one but Arthur and Lancelot knew his name.

Soon after this, Lynette appeared at the court, complaining that her sister Lyonors<sup>1</sup> was detained in Castle Perilous by four knights, one of whom wished to wed her against her will; and she asked that Lancelot should go with her to conquer the false knights. Gareth, to whom the King had promised the first quest when he made him knight, asked to be sent on this mission. But Lynette was angry with Gareth, and scorned him, for she knew that he had been Sir Kay's "kitchen-knave." Yet Arthur fulfilled his promise to the young knight, and gave him the quest.

So Gareth and Lynette started forth, and he bore her scorn patiently. Sir Kay, his former master in the kitchen, followed to bring him back, but he overthrew Sir Kay, and went forward to do his King's bidding. Then he came to Morning Star, the first of the discourteous knights who were besieging the Lady Lyonors, and he overcame him. After a time he came upon the second of the knights, called Noonday Sun, and sent him defeated to King Arthur. Later he found the third knight, Evening Star, keeping guard upon a bridge, and cast him into the river. Then Lynette mocked him no longer, but began to look upon him with favor; for his perfect gentleness and courage had at last touched her heart.

Meanwhile Lancelot had followed to keep a guard on the young knight, and when he saw Gareth bearing a shield with a gleaming star, the shield which the

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Li'ōnōrs.

knight, Morning Star, had been wont to carry, he thought that Gareth had been slain by his enemies, and attacked him, in error. Gareth was thrown from his horse at the first shock, and recognized Sir Lancelot. Then Lancelot gave Gareth his own horse and shield to use in fighting with the fourth knight, called Death. But Gareth found that this knight was merely a phantom. Then the Lady Lyonors was freed, and Gareth won the love of Lynette.

2. *The Marriage of Geraint.*<sup>1</sup> As King Arthur held his court at Caerleon upon Usk, in Wales, word came to him that a hart, taller than any other, and milky white, was ranging the forests. The knights and ladies went forth to hunt it. As Queen Guinevere was waiting for the hart to be driven towards her, a knight who did not belong to the Round Table used the maiden of the Queen discourteously; Geraint, a prince of Devon, who had come to the hunt unarmed, rode after the knight to avenge the insult. He followed him into a town where he found all the people busy preparing for a tournament, and every hostel full. They told him to go over the bridge to Earl Yniol's,<sup>2</sup> for there he might be entertained.

Going thither Geraint found the hall in ruins, the Earl in worn-out garments that had once been magnificent, his wife in dingy brocade, and his daughter Enid<sup>3</sup> in faded silk. They were oppressed by the Earl's nephew, Edyrn, called the sparrow-hawk, who proved to be the very man who had insulted the Queen. He wished to wed Enid by force, and now Geraint, who loved Enid, offered to fight against Edyrn.

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Gērā'nt.    <sup>2</sup> Pronounced Īn'iol.    <sup>3</sup> Pronounced Ē'nid.

Yniol provided him with arms, and he went to the tournament, where he defeated the sparrow-hawk, sending him to ask pardon of the Queen.

Then Enid was wedded to Geraint, and they came to the court of Arthur again. There they lived, loving each other ; and the Queen loved Enid more than any other lady of her court. But Enid, remembering how Geraint had found her, always kept the faded silk she wore on the day he first saw her in her father's hall.

3. *Geraint and Enid.* Then there came to the ears of Geraint the rumor of the guilty love that the Queen bore to Lancelot, King Arthur's sworn friend, and he feared lest his wife Enid might be contaminated. So he asked leave of the King to go to his own land beyond the Severn, and the King granted his request. There Geraint came, and went neither to tournament nor to the hunt, nor did he attend to the needs of his people, but remained always with his wife Enid, so great was his love for her.

His people grew dissatisfied with him ; and when his wife heard what they said, she was sad at heart. One day as he lay asleep she said aloud : " Alas ! is it my fault that the people murmur ? I fear I am no true wife !" Just then Geraint awoke and heard the last words. In anger he sprang from his couch, for he misunderstood her words, thinking that she loved another knight, and he ordered her to put on her worst and meanest dress and to mount her palfrey. She patiently obeyed him, putting on the faded silk she had worn on the day that he had first seen her in her father's hall. And so, she on her palfrey and he on his charger, they set forth, Enid always riding on

before and keeping silence, according to her lord's command.

But as they rode she heard three villains plotting against Geraint's life, and she dared to disobey him, and gave him warning. He dismissed her with harsh words, overcame the knights, fastened their horses together, and forced Enid to drive them along the way. At evening she heard three others plot against her lord, and again she dared to break the silence. But Geraint again spoke harsh words to her, fought with the knights and killed them, and gave her their three horses also to drive along the way.

Soon they came to a town whose lord was Limours, a nobleman who had once sued for Enid's hand; and as they rested in the town he came to woo her again. But she dismissed him with wise words, and escaped with her husband toward the land of Earl Doorm. As they went along Enid saw Limours pursuing, and again she warned her husband, this time not by speaking, but by pointing. Then the two knights fought, and again Geraint was victorious, but he was wounded beneath his armor, and bled secretly. He fell from his horse, weak from loss of blood. Enid bound up the wound and sat by the roadside, weeping. Then came Earl Doorm, who bade his men carry Geraint to the Earl's hall.

Here Enid sat for long hours weeping beside her lord. He awoke from his faint at last, and knew she wept for him, but he still pretended to swoon, for he wished to test her to the uttermost. Then Earl Doorm called upon Enid to eat and to drink wine, but she refused to do either until her lord Geraint arose and

looked at her. Earl Doorm was angry at her refusal, and ordered her to put on a beautiful dress that he brought her. But again she refused, telling him that she wore the faded silk because her lord had found her in it when he first loved her in her father's hall. At this the Earl was still more angry, and struck her in the face. Then Geraint could endure the shame of his wife's suffering no longer. He sprang up, and with one sweep of his sword struck off the head of Earl Doorm. Then, with his faithful wife, he mounted his charger and escaped.

Thus was the truth of Enid tested, and Geraint never doubted her love again.

4. *Balin and Balan.*<sup>1</sup> Two brothers, Balin and Balan, sat by a fountain near to Camelot. Here they overthrew every knight that came against them. Then King Arthur went out and easily conquered the brothers. When he returned he sent a messenger to ask them to come to court. He made them Knights of the Round Table, and sent Balan forth to avenge the death of one of Arthur's knights, but kept Balin at the court.

One day Balin discovered the love between the Queen and Lancelot; and, angered at the thought that he should have seen the proofs of the Queen's disloyalty, he rode forth along the same track that his brother Balan had followed, bearing on his shield the crown of Queen Guinevere as his coat of arms. Soon he met Sir Garlon, who asked him why he bore the crown of a shameful queen. Then Balin was angered at Sir Garlon's words, and when they had fought he rode

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Bā'lin and Bā'lān.

away through the forest at random until his horse stumbled over a fallen oak and threw him to the ground. He hung the crown upon a branch and cast himself down in the gloomy shade of the trees.

After a time Vivien and her page came that way. She too mocked Balin for bearing arms which had the false Queen's crown for coat.

Then in his anger he flung the crown to the ground, trampled it in the dust, and with a loud cry hurled it from him into the forest weeds. That cry was heard by Balan, as he was returning unsuccessful from his quest. He saw the Queen's crown being used shamefully; and he struck his brother, not knowing who he was. Then they fought to the death before they knew that each was fighting his own brother. And so these two knights died because of the wickedness of Queen Guinevere.

5. *Merlin and Vivien.*<sup>1</sup> Vivien, a wicked woman from the court of King Mark of Cornwall, went to the court of Arthur and attempted to lead the King astray. She did not accomplish her desire, but she spread evil rumors about the court, and she succeeded in fascinating the great sage, Merlin. She led him to the woods of Broceliande<sup>2</sup> in Brittany, and there prevailed upon him to give her the secret of his most powerful charm. When he yielded it to her, she used its power to bind him fast in the hollow oak, where he lay as dead. "Fool," she cried exultantly, and leaped adown the forest as it echoed "fool."

6. *Lancelot and Elaine.*<sup>3</sup> King Arthur had for the

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Mĕr'lin and VI'ven.    <sup>2</sup> Pronounced Brōke'liand.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced Ělā'n.

last eight years proclaimed a yearly joust, that the knights of his court might contend for the jewels of the crown of a nameless king, that he had found in the trackless realms of Lyonesse. This year was to see the ninth and last joust, and the prize was to be the central diamond of the crown. Lancelot had hitherto won all the jewels and kept them for the Queen; but this last year he wished to stay with Queen Guinevere, and feigned to be sick. But Guinevere asked him to go unknown to the joust, for she claimed that he had so far won by his name rather than by his skill.

So, at her desire, he went away; but he wandered until he came to Astolat,<sup>1</sup> and there he was seen and loved by Elaine, the lily maid. But he could not return her love, for he was bound by his passion for Queen Guinevere. He left Astolat without saying a word to Elaine, though he wore her favor, a sleeve with pearls, in the joust, and won the diamond. But he was wounded, and Elaine came to him and attended him. Still he did not return her love for him, and when the maiden learned that her love was hopeless she went back to her father's hall, and died of grief. Her father placed her body in a barge, and she was oared upward with the tide to Camelot, just as Guinevere, in a fit of jealousy, threw into the stream the diamonds that Lancelot had won for her. The King buried Elaine with all honor when he learned her story. Thus the pure maiden died because of the guilty love of Lancelot and Queen Guinevere.

7. *The Holy Grail.* The sin of Lancelot and the Queen began to bring greater and greater harm to

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Å'stölät.

the Knights of the Round Table. They turned from practical goodness and holiness to superstition. And so when the sister of Sir Percival proclaimed to her brother that she had seen the Holy Grail,—the sacred cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper, and which was the supreme end of man's desires,—they began to fast and watch for the vision. Once, as they sat in the great hall, the Grail appeared, but covered, and no one saw it but Galahad.

Then the knights all vowed to follow it; and in spite of King Arthur's warnings they went forth on the quest. But only two went not in vain—Sir Galahad, who found it and was seen on earth no more, and Sir Percivale, who did not attain it, but saw it, and came back untroubled by phantoms. All the others followed only "wandering fires," and but a few of them ever came back to King Arthur's hall.

8. *Pelleas and Ettarre.*<sup>1</sup> After the disastrous quest of the Holy Grail, in which so many of the knights were lost, King Arthur made new knights. One of these was Pelleas of the Isles, who came to the hall at Caerleon upon Usk, in Wales; "and the sunshine came along with him." He had seen the fair Ettarre in the wood, and loved her; but she had despised and mocked him. Then he would take no denial, and he asked to be made a knight, that he might win a joust for her, and the King consented. When the new-made knight won the prize, Ettarre pretended to be pleased with him. Then she started for her own city, and Pelleas followed her in spite of her mockery. When at length they came to her home, he kept watch outside the walls of her city,

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Pel'leas and Ētar'.

for she did not invite him within. He obeyed Ettarre's every caprice, even allowing himself to be bound by her and sent away from her with scorn.

As he came forth with hands bound, he met Sir Gawain,<sup>1</sup> who was angered at seeing a noble knight so shamefully used; and he asked Pelleas the reason. Pelleas told him of Ettarre, and Sir Gawain asked leave to go to Ettarre and win her for Pelleas. Pelleas gave his consent, and for three days he awaited the coming of Gawain, who did not return. Then Pelleas, tired of waiting, went toward the city and found that the false Gawain had won the love of Ettarre for himself. As soon as he discovered this, Pelleas rode madly back to Camelot. When Lancelot and the Queen heard his story, they foresaw all that their own sin would bring upon the Knights of the Round Table.

9. *The Last Tournament.* The times were rapidly growing worse, and even at the court of Arthur in Camelot wickedness began to triumph over good. The tournament, that was held in memory of the babe which had been found by Arthur and Lancelot, was won by Tristram, a false knight who loved Isolt, the wife of King Mark of Cornwall. When he had won the victory he rode to Isolt, to give her the prize. As they spoke together, her husband, Mark, stole upon them like a shadow, and clove Tristram through the brain.

That night King Arthur came home to Camelot and found the Queen's bower all dark and deserted. Her wicked love for Lancelot had been discovered by Modred, and she had fled from King Arthur's court.

<sup>1</sup> In this word *aw* is pronounced as *a* in *fall*. *Gaw'āin*.

10. *Guinevere.* With this Idyll, the stories of the Round Table come to an end.

Guinevere had gone to Almesbury, and thither the King followed her, not to blame her, but to forgive. Overcome by her shame and sorrow, she was unable to speak or even to look at the King, as he bade her farewell. She became a nun, and dwelt at Almesbury until she died "and past to where beyond these voices there is peace." Lancelot went into his own land of Brittany, where he repented, and at the last died a holy man.

III. *The Passing of Arthur.* Meanwhile Modred had stirred up rebellion against the King in his absence, and usurped the throne, so that when Arthur returned he was forced to fight his enemies. Then took place the last dim, weird battle of the west on the farthest bound of Lyonnesse, in which the King slew the traitor Modred, but was himself grievously wounded. All his knights had fallen except Sir Bedivere, who bore his lord from the field to a chapel near.

Sir Bedivere went to the lake and threw into it Excalibur, Arthur's famous sword, and afterwards bore the dying King down to the shore. Then there came a barge, "dark as a funeral scarf," bearing "three Queens with crowns of gold." They took the King upon the barge; and then, as they nursed him and wept, they moved from the brink, down the long water opening on the deep, and vanished into light.

"From the great deep to the great deep he goes," thought Sir Bedivere, as he stood gazing for a last sight of his King; and as he stood, "the new sun rose, bringing the new year."

## THE MEANING OF THE IDYLLS

As to the meaning of the poems, it will suffice to quote the poet's own words :

" Poetry is like shot-silk with many glancing colors. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his sympathy with the poet. [The epic of Arthur] is the dream of a man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle of generations."<sup>1</sup>

The poem is allegorical of the struggle with sin : " If epic unity is looked for in the *Idylls*, we find it not in the wrath of an Achilles, nor in the wanderings of an Ulysses, but in the unending war of humanity in all ages,—the world-wide war of Sense and Soul, typified in individuals with the subtle interaction of character upon character, the central dominant figure being the pure, generous, tender, brave, human-hearted Arthur, — so that the links (with here and there symbolic accessories) which bind the *Idylls* into an artistic whole, are perhaps somewhat intricate."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Memoir of Tennyson by his son, II, 127.

<sup>2</sup> Memoir, II, 130.

## THE VERSE OF *THE IDYLLS OF THE KING*

The *Idylls* are written in *blank verse*, that is, in lines of *five iambic feet*, without rhyme. An *iambic foot*, or *iamb*, consists of two syllables, the second of which is accented. An example is,—

Elaine | the fair, | Elaine | the lov-|able,

Elaine, | the lí-|ly maid | of As-|tolat.

—*Lancelot and Elaine*, I-2.

It must be remembered that these lines merely show the *normal line*, or *type*, to which all the lines do not by any means wholly conform; and we must not read all the lines as if they were the unchanged iambic pentameter. If we do, we make the verse intolerably monotonous, and sacrifice the beautiful variety which the poet introduces to adapt his verse to the changes of thought and feeling. On this point we may refer to Tennyson's own words :

“The English public think that blank verse is the easiest thing in the world to write, mere prose cut up into five-foot lines; whereas it is one of the most difficult. In a blank verse you can have from three up to eight beats. . . . The varying of the beats, of the construction of the feet, of the emphasis, of the extra-metrical syllables and of the pauses, helps to make the greatness of blank verse.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Memoir, II, 14.

Tennyson sought the variety of which he speaks in this quotation by artistically varying the structure of his lines. The chief variations are:

- I. Substitution of other feet for the iamb.
- II. Variation of the *cæsura*, and of the *run-on line*.
- III. Use of the feminine rhythm.
- IV. Use of alliteration and imitative harmony.
- V. The introduction of occasional rhymed songs.

I. Substitution of other feet. 1. A trochee, that is, a foot of two syllables with the accent on the first, is frequently substituted.

*Stáred at | the spátē. | A slén|der shaft|ed pine.*

— *Gareth and Lynette*, 3.

*Roáring, | and áll | the wáve | was in | a fláme.*

— *The Coming of Arthur*, 381.

*Set lánce | in résť, | strike spúr, | súdden|ly móve.*

— *Lancelot and Elaine*, 454.

2. A *spondee*, that is, a foot of two syllables, both of which are accented, is sometimes substituted.

*Like this | lást dím | weird bátlé of | the wést.*

— *The Passing of Arthur*, 94.

*The báre, | bláck clíff | clánged róund | him, ás | he baséd.*

— *The Passing of Arthur*, 356.

Note the slow, dignified movement given the verse by the succession of heavily accented syllables. There are many examples of this arrangement of syllables in *The Passing of Arthur*.

3. Feet of more than two syllables are sometimes substituted, e.g. the *dactyl*, consisting of an accented syllable followed by two unaccented.

*Mélody | on bráñch | and mél|ody in | míd air.*

— *Gareth and Lynette*, 180.

*Glorying*; | and in | the stréam | beneath | him shóné.  
— *Gareth and Lynette*, 913.

*Tumbled it*; | oilí|ly bub|bled up | the mère.  
— *Gareth and Lynette*, 796.

4. The *anapæst*, a foot with three syllables, the last of which is accented, is frequently substituted.

Hurled as | a stone | from out | of a cat|apúl.  
— *Gareth and Lynette*, 941.

And flash|ing round | and round, | and whirl'd | in an arch.  
— *The Passing of Arthur*, 306.

See also the fourth foot of *Gareth and Lynette*, 180, quoted under (3) above.

II. The *cæsura* is the pause within the line. By a skilful variation of the position of this pause, great flexibility is given to the verse.

The opening lines of *Lancelot and Elaine* will illustrate this :

Elaine the fair, || Elaine the lovable,  
Elaine, || the lily maid of Astolat,  
High in her chamber || up a tower to the east  
Guarded the sacred shield || of Lancelot ;  
Which first she placed || where morning's earliest ray  
Might strike it, || and awake her with the gleam ;  
Then fearing rust or soilure || fashion'd for it  
A case of silk, || and braided thereupon  
All the devices || blazon'd on the shield  
In their own tinct, || and added, of her wit,  
A border fantasy || of branch and flow(er,  
And yellow-throated nestling || in her nest.

Considerable variation in placing the cæsura appears in this passage ; it moves from the position after the first foot to the middle of the fourth foot. This latter position draws attention to the fact that the pause may

come in the middle of a foot, giving what is called the *weak*, or *feminine, cæsura*.

Similar variety in the use of *run-on lines* is shown in this passage. A *run-on line* is one which has no pause at the end, but *runs on* into the next line. A clear example appears in the fifth line—

—where morning's earliest ray  
Might strike it.

Other examples are seen in lines 7, 8, and 9 of the extract.

III. This passage shows what is called the *feminine*, or *weak, ending* of lines. Such lines have an extra unaccented syllable at the end, which gives them a lightness of movement that is very expressive.

Line 11 of the extract reads :

A bór|der fan|tasy | of bráncb | and flow(er).

Here the *-er* is an extra syllable.

And Ar|thur gave | him back | his terr | it ór(y).

— *Gareth and Lynette*, 77.

IV. The use of alliteration, that is, the repetition of the same sounds, is to be noted in Tennyson's verse.

The uses may be classified as follows, though the different varieties are usually found together :

1. Sometimes the alliteration extends only to two words :

Wild water; stem to stern; level lake; living light.

2. Sometimes, again, the alliteration binds the line together :

A border fantasy of branch and flower.

— *Lancelot and Elaine*, 11.

*Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat.*

— *Lancelot and Elaine*, 2.

3. Again, the alliteration may extend to two or more lines, and is an exceedingly effective means of making these lines into unified wholes :

I heard the *ripple washing* in the *reeds*  
And the *wild water lapping* on the *crag*.

— *The Passing of Arthur*, 238–239.

Dry dash'd his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels —  
And on a sudden, lo the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon !

— *The Passing of Arthur*, 354–360.

The verse of this foregoing passage (which may be taken as the type of many) is not merely alliterative. It is in harmony with the subject, and expressive of it. In the first lines we hear the “clash” of his “harness,” and the “dint of armed heels”; and then in the smooth *l*’s and the broad vowel *o*, we have suggested to us something entirely different—the level lake lighted by the rays of the moon. The *Idylls* show many instances of this imitative harmony; and indeed nearly every variation in the verse may be said to exist not merely for variety’s sake but for the sake of greater expressiveness.

V. The incidental songs furnish some excellent examples of rhyme introduced into blank verse. In *The Coming of Arthur* we find the ringing war-song, beginning,—

"Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May,"  
with its refrain,

"Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign,"  
which is repeated with slight variations.

In *Gareth and Lynette*, Lynette's song changes with each victory won by Gareth, and expresses the growth of her love for him.

In *Lancelot and Elaine* again, we have Elaine's sad, sweet song,

"Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain,"  
which shows us the depth of her hopeless love for Lancelot.

It is to be noted that all these songs are framed in five-foot lines with rhyme. On this account they do not make too violent an interruption in the movement of their blank-verse surroundings.

In conclusion, let it be said that a careful reading of the *Idylls* will prove the truth of these words of Professor Corson :—

"For perfect grace and an airy lightsomeness of movement; for melody and harmony in all their various forms, from the most easily appreciable up to the most subtle; for organic variety of measures . . . and for almost every other element of expressiveness, the young student can read no poems superior to the 'Idylls of the King,'—none that will serve better to tune his feelings to organic poetic form."

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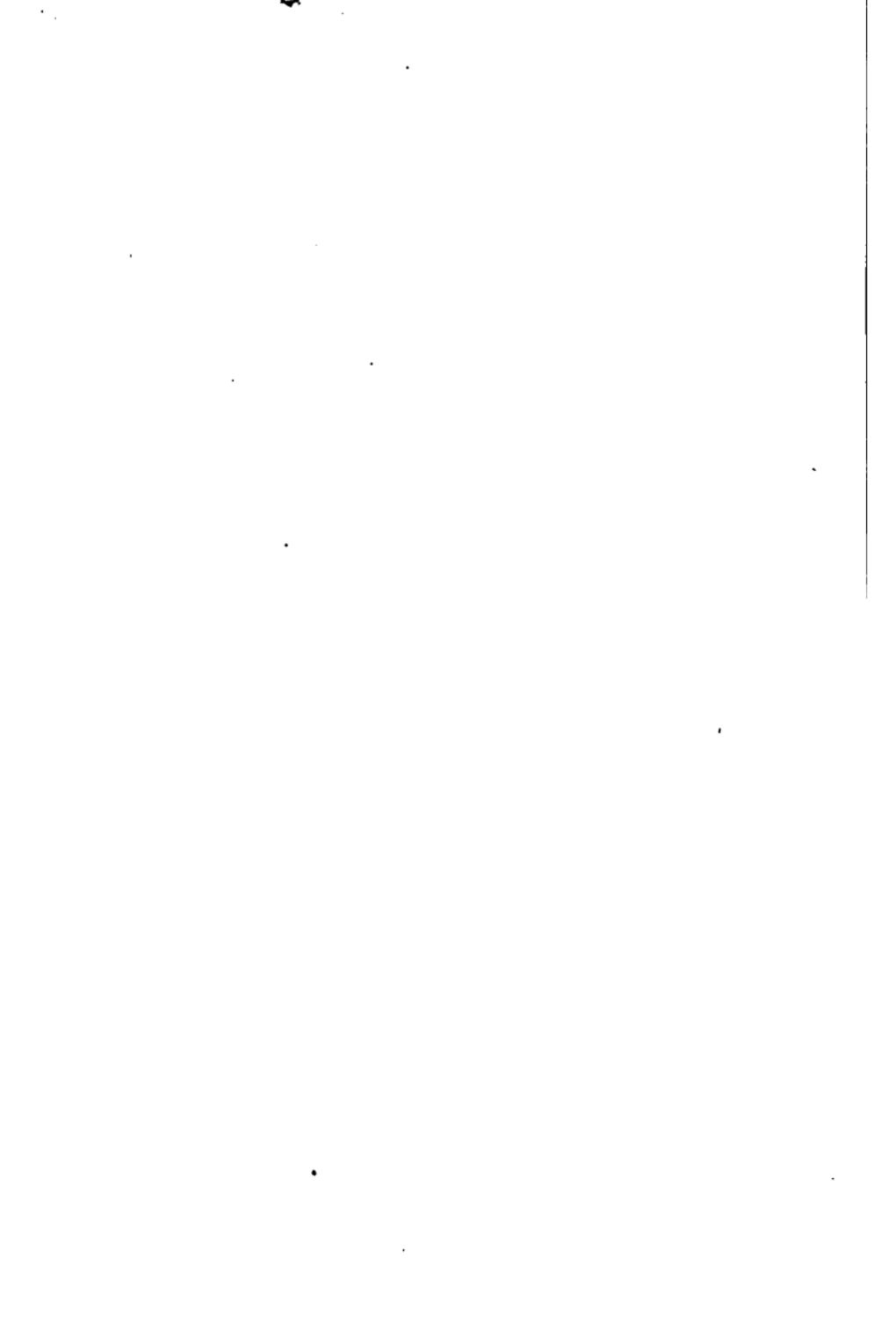
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### Other poems by Tennyson on Arthurian subjects suggested for reading—

*Guinevere, The Lady of Shalott, Sir Galahad, Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, Merlin and the Gleam.*

TENNYSON'S  
THE COMING OF ARTHUR  
GARETH AND LYNETTE  
LANCELOT AND ELAINE  
AND THE PASSING  
OF ARTHUR







STATUE OF KING ARTHUR  
TENBROOK

## IDYLLS OF THE KING

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### THE COMING OF ARTHUR

LEODOGRAN, the King of Cameliard,  
Had one fair daughter, and none other child ;  
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,  
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came  
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war  
Each upon other, wasted all the land ;  
And still from time to time the heathen host  
Swarm'd overseas, and harried what was left.  
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,  
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,  
But man was less and less, till Arthur came,  
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,  
And after him King Uther fought and died,  
But either fail'd to make the kingdom one.  
And after these King Arthur for a space,  
And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,  
Drew all their petty princedoms under him,  
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reign'd.

10

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,  
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,

20

And none or few to scare or chase the beast ;  
 So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear  
 Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,  
 And wallow'd in the gardens of the King.  
 And ever and anon the wolf would steal  
 The children and devour, but now and then,  
 Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat  
 To human sucklings ; and the children, housed  
 In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,  
 And mock their foster-mother on four feet,  
 Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men,  
 Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran  
 Groan'd for the Roman legions here again,  
 And Cæsar's eagle : then his brother king,  
 Urien, assail'd him : last a heathen horde,  
 Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,  
 And on the spike that split the mother's heart  
 Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,  
 He knew not whither he should turn for aid.

30

40

But — for he heard of Arthur newly crown'd,  
 Tho' not without an uproar made by those  
 Who cried, 'He is not Uther's son' — the King  
 Sent to him, saying, 'Arise, and help us thou !  
 For here between the man and beast we die.'

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,  
 But heard the call, and came : and Guinevere  
 Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass ;  
 But since he neither wore on helm or shield  
 The golden symbol of his kinglihood,  
 But rode a simple knight among his knights,

50

And many of these in richer arms than he,  
 She saw him not, or mark'd not, if she saw,  
 One among many, tho' his face was bare.  
 But Arthur, looking downward as he past,  
 Felt the light of her eyes into his life  
 Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitch'd d  
 His tents beside the forest. Then he drove  
 The heathen ; after, slew the beast, and fell'd  
 The forest, letting in the sun, and made  
 Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight  
 And so return'd.

60

For while he linger'd there,  
 A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts  
 Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm  
 Flash'd forth and into war : for most of these,  
 Colleaguing with a score of petty kings,  
 Made head against him, crying, 'Who is he  
 That he should rule us ? who hath proven him  
 King Uther's son ? for lo ! we look at him,  
 And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,  
 Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.  
 This is the son of Gorloïs, not the King ;  
 This is the son of Anton, not the King.'

70

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt  
 Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,  
 Désiring to be join'd with Guinevere ;  
 And thinking as he rode, ' Her father said  
 That there between the man and beast they die.  
 Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts  
 Up to my throne, and side by side with me ?

80

What happiness to reign a lonely king,  
 Vext—O ye stars that shudder over me,  
 O earth that soundest hollow under me,  
 Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be join'd  
 To her that is the fairest under heaven,  
 I seem as nothing in the mighty world,  
 And cannot will my will, nor work my work  
 Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm  
 Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,  
 Then might we live together as one life,  
 And reigning with one will in everything  
 Have power on this dark land to lighten it,  
 And power on this dead world to make it live.'

90

Thereafter—as he speaks who tells the tale—  
 When Arthur reach'd a field-of-battle bright  
 With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world  
 Was all so clear about him, that he saw  
 The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,  
 And even in high day the morning star.  
 So when the King had set his banner broad,  
 At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,  
 And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,  
 The long-lanced battle let their horses run.  
 And now the Barons and the kings prevail'd,  
 And now the King, as here and there that war  
 Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world  
 Made lightnings and great thunders over him,  
 And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,  
 And mightier of his hands with every blow,  
 And leading all his knighthood threw the kings  
 Carádos, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,

100

110

Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,  
 The King Brandagoras of Latangor,  
 With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,  
 And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice  
 As dreadful as the shout of one who sees  
 To one who sins, and deems himself alone  
 And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake  
 Flying, and Arthur call'd to stay the brands  
 That hack'd among the flyers, 'Ho! they yield!'      120  
 So like a painted battle the war stood  
 Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,  
 And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.  
 He laugh'd upon his warrior whom he loved  
 And honor'd most. 'Thou dost not doubt me King,  
 So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day.'  
 'Sir and my liege,' he cried, 'the fire of God  
 Descends upon thee in the battle-field :  
 I know thee for my King!' Whereat the two,  
 For each had warded either in the fight,      130  
 Sware on the field of death a deathless love.  
 And Arthur said, 'Man's word is God in man :  
 Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death.'

Then quickly from the foughten field he sent  
 Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,  
 His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,  
 Saying, 'If I in aught have served thee well,  
 Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife.'

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart  
 Debating — 'How should I that am a king,  
 However much he holp me at my need,

Give my one daughter saving to a king,  
 And a king's son?' — lifted his voice, and call'd  
 A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom  
 He trusted all things, and of him required  
 His counsel: 'Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?'

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said,  
 'Sir King, there be but two old men that know:  
 And each is twice as old as I; and one  
 Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served  
 King Uther thro' his magic art; and one  
 Is Merlin's master (so they call him) Bleys,  
 Who taught him magic; but the scholar ran  
 Before the master, and so far, that Bleys  
 Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote  
 All things and whatsoever Merlin did  
 In one great annal-book, where after-years  
 Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth.'

150

To whom the King Leodogran replied,  
 'O friend, had I been holpen half as well  
 By this King Arthur as by thee to-day,  
 Then beast and man had had their share of me:  
 But summon here before us yet once more  
 Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere.'

160

Then, when they came before him, the King said,  
 'I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,  
 And reason in the chase: but wherefore now  
 Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,  
 Some calling Arthur born of Gorloïs,  
 Others of Anton? Tell me, ye yourselves,  
 Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?'

170

And Ulfius and Brastias answer'd, 'Ay.'  
 Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights  
 Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake —  
 For bold in heart and act and word was he,  
 Whenever slander breathed against the King —

' Sir, there be many rumors on this head :  
 For there be those who hate him in their hearts,  
 Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,  
 And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man :      180  
 And there be those who deem him more than man,  
 And dream he dropt from heaven : but my belief  
 In all this matter — so ye care to learn —  
 Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time  
 The prince and warrior Gorloïs, he that held  
 Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,  
 Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne :  
 And daughters had she borne him, — one whereof,  
 Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,  
 Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved      190  
 To Arthur, — but a son she had not borne.  
 And Uther cast upon her eyes of love :  
 But she, a stainless wife to Gorloïs,  
 So loathed the bright dishonor of his love,  
 That Gorloïs and King Uther went to war :  
 And overthrown was Gorloïs and slain.  
 Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged  
 Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,  
 Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,  
 Left her and fled, and Uther enter'd in,      200  
 And there was none to call to but himself.  
 So, compass'd by the power of the King,

Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,  
And with a shameful swiftness : afterward,  
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,  
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule  
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.  
And that same night, the night of the new year,  
By reason of the bitterness and grief  
That vexed his mother, all before his time  
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born  
Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate  
To Merlin, to be holden far apart  
Until his hour should come ; because the lords  
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this,  
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child  
Piecemeal among them, had they known ; for each  
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,  
And many hated Uther for the sake  
Of Gorloïs. Wherefore Merlin took the child,      220  
And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight  
And ancient friend of Uther ; and his wife  
Nursed the young prince, and rear'd him with her own ;  
And no man knew. And ever since the lords  
Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves,  
So that the realm has gone to wrack : but now,  
This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come)  
Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,  
Proclaiming, "Here is Uther's heir, your king,"  
A hundred voices cried, "Away with him !      230  
No king of ours ! a son of Gorloïs he,  
Or else the child of Anton, and no king,  
Or else baseborn." Yet Merlin thro' his craft,  
And while the people clamor'd for a king,

Had Arthur crown'd ; but after, the great lords  
Banded, and so brake out in open war.'

Then while the King debated with himself  
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,  
Or born the son of Gorloïs, after death,  
Or Uther's son, and born before his time,  
Or whether there were truth in anything  
Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,  
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,  
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent ;  
Whom as he could, not as he would, the King  
Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat,  
' A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.  
Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men  
Report him ! Yea, but ye — think ye this king —  
So many those that hate him, and so strong,  
So few his knights, however brave they be —  
Hath body enow to hold his foemen down ? '

240

250

' O King,' she cried, ' and I will tell thee : few,  
Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him ;  
For I was near him when the savage yells  
Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat  
Crowned on the daïs, and his warriors cried,  
" Be thou the king, and we will work thy will  
Who love thee." Then the King in low deep tones,  
And simple words of great authority,  
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,  
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some  
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,

260

Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes  
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

' But when he spake, and cheer'd his Table Round  
With large, divine, and comfortable words,  
Beyond my tongue to tell thee — I beheld  
From eye to eye thro' all their Order flash  
A momentary likeness of the King :  
And ere it left their faces, thro' the cross  
And those around it and the Crucified,  
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote  
Flame-color, vert and azure, in three rays,  
One falling upon each of three fair queens,  
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends  
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright  
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

270

' And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit  
And hundred winters are but as the hands  
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

280

' And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,  
Who knows a subtler magic than his own —  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.  
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,  
Whereby to drive the heathen out : a mist  
Of incense curl'd about her, and her face  
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom ;  
But there was heard among the holy hymns  
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells  
Down in a deep ; calm, whatsoever storms  
May shake the world, and when the surface roll  
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

290

' There likewise I beheld Excalibur  
 Before him at his crowning borne, the sword  
 That rose from out the bosom of the lake,  
 And Arthur row'd across and took it — rich  
 With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,  
 Bewildering heart and eye — the blade so bright  
 That men are blinded by it — on one side,  
 Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,  
 "Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,  
 And written in the speech ye speak yourself,  
 "Cast me away!" And sad was Arthur's face  
 Taking it, but old Merlin counsell'd him,  
 "Take thou and strike! the time to cast away  
 Is yet far-off." So this great brand the king  
 Took, and by this will beat his foemen down.'

300

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought  
 To sift his doubtings to the last; and ask'd,  
 Fixing full eyes of question on her face,  
 'The swallow and the swift are near akin,  
 But thou art closer to this noble prince,  
 Being his own dear sister ;' and she said,  
 ' Daughter of Gorloïs and Ygerne am I ;'  
 ' And therefore Arthur's sister ?' ask'd the King.  
 She answer'd, ' These be secret things,' and sign'd  
 To those two sons to pass, and let them be.  
 And Gawain went, and breaking into song  
 Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair  
 Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw :  
 But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,  
 And there half-heard ; the same that afterward  
 Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

310

320

And then the Queen made answer, ‘What know I ?  
 For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,  
 And dark in hair and eyes am I ; and dark  
 Was Gorloïs, yea and dark was Uther too,  
 Wellnigh to blackness ; but this King is fair  
 Beyond the race of Britons and of men.

Moreover, always in my mind I hear  
 A cry from out the dawning of my life,  
 A mother weeping, and I hear her say,  
 “O that ye had some brother, pretty one,  
 To guard thee on the rough ways of the world.”’

330

‘Ay,’ said the King, ‘and hear ye such a cry ?  
 But when did Arthur chance upon thee first ?’

‘O King !’ she cried, ‘and I will tell thee true :  
 He found me first when yet a little maid :  
 Beaten I had been for a little fault

Whereof I was not guilty ; and out I ran  
 And flung myself down on a bank of heath,  
 And hated this fair world and all therein,  
 And wept, and wish’d that I were dead ; and he—  
 I know not whether of himself he came,  
 Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk  
 Unseen at pleasure — he was at my side,  
 And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,  
 And dried my tears, being a child with me.  
 And many a time he came, and evermore

As I grew greater grew with me ; and sad  
 At times he seem’d, and sad with him was I,  
 Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,  
 But sweet again, and then I loved him well.

340

350

And now of late I see him less and less,  
But those first days had golden hours for me,  
For then I surely thought he would be king.

‘ But let me tell thee now another tale :  
For Bleys, our Merlin’s master, as they say,  
Died but of late, and sent his cry to me,  
To hear him speak before he left his life.  
Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage ;  
And when I enter’d told me that himself  
And Merlin ever served about the King,  
Uther, before he died ; and on the night  
When Uther in Tintagil past away  
Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two  
Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,  
Then from the castle gateway by the chasm  
Descending thro’ the dismal night — a night  
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost —  
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps  
It seem’d in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof  
A dragon wing’d, and all from stem to stern  
Bright with a shining people on the decks,  
And gone as soon as seen. And then the two  
Dropt to the cove, and watch’d the great sea fall,  
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,  
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep  
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged  
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame :  
And down the wave and in the flame was borne  
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin’s feet,  
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried “ The King !  
Here is an heir for Uther ! ” And the fringe

Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,  
Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,  
And all at once all round him rose in fire,  
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.  
And presently thereafter follow'd calm, 390  
Free sky and stars : " And this same child," he said,  
" Is he who reigns ; nor could I part in peace  
Till this were told." And saying this the seer  
Went thro' the strait and dreadful pass of death,  
Not ever to be question'd any more  
Save on the further side ; but when I met 400  
Merlin, and ask'd him if these things were truth —  
The shining dragon and the naked child  
Descending in the glory of the seas —  
He laugh'd as is his wont, and answer'd me  
In riddling triplets of old time, and said :

" " Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow in the sky !  
A young man will be wiser by and by ;  
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow on the lea !  
And truth is this to me, and that to thee ;  
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

Rain, sun, and rain ! and the free blossom blows :  
Sun, rain, and sun ! and where is he who knows ?  
From the great deep to the great deep he goes." 410

' So Merlin riddling anger'd me ; but thou  
Fear not to give this King thine only child,

Guinevere : so great bards of him will sing  
 Hereafter ; and dark sayings from of old  
 Ranging and ringing thro' the minds of men,  
 And echo'd by old folk beside their fires  
 • For comfort after their wage-work is done,  
 Speak of the King ; and Merlin in our time  
 Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn  
 Tho' men may wound him that he will not die,      420  
 But pass, again to come ; and then or now  
 Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,  
 Till these and all men hail him for their king.'

She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,  
 But musing ' Shall I answer yea or nay ? '  
 Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,  
 Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,  
 Field after field, up to a height, the peak  
 Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,  
 Now looming, and now lost ; and on the slope      430  
 The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,  
 Fire glimpsed ; and all the land from roof and rick,  
 In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,  
 Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze  
 And made it thicker ; while the phantom king  
 Sent out at times a voice ; and here or there  
 Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest  
 Slew on and burnt, crying, ' No king of ours,  
 No son of Uther, and no king of ours ; '  
 Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze      440  
 Descended, and the solid earth became  
 As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,  
 Crown'd. And Leodogran awoke, and sent

Ulfius, and Brastias and Bedivere,  
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved  
And honor'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth  
And bring the Queen ; — and watch'd him from the gates :  
And Lancelot past away among the flowers,  
(For then was latter April), and return'd      450  
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.  
To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,  
Chief of the church in Britain, and before  
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King  
That morn was married, while in stainless white,  
The fair beginners of a nobler time,  
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights  
Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.  
Far shone the fields of May thro' open door,  
The sacred altar blossom'd white with May,      460  
The Sun of May descended on their King,  
They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,  
Roll'd incense, and there past along the hymns  
A voice as of the waters, while the two  
Swore at the shrine of Christ a deathless love :  
And Arthur said, ' Behold, thy doom is mine.  
Let chance what will, I love thee to the death ! '  
To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,  
' King and my lord, I love thee to the death ! '  
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake,      470  
' Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world  
Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,  
And all this Order of thy Table Round  
Fulfil the boundless purpose of their King ! '

So Dubric said ; but when they left the shrine  
 Great Lords from Rome before the portal stood,  
 In scornful stillness gazing as they past ;  
 Then while they paced a city all on fire  
 With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,  
 And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King :— 480

‘ Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May ;  
 Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away !  
 Blow thro' the living world — “ Let the King reign.”

‘ Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm ?  
 Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm,  
 Fall battleaxe, and flash brand ! Let the King reign.

‘ Strike for the King and live ! his knights have heard  
 That God hath told the King a secret word.  
 Fall battleaxe, and flash brand ! Let the King reign.

‘ Blow trumpet ! he will lift us from the dust. 490  
 Blow trumpet ! live the strength and die the lust !  
 Clang battleaxe, and clash brand ! Let the King reign.

‘ Strike for the King and die ! and if thou diest,  
 The King is King, and ever wills the highest.  
 Clang battleaxe, and clash brand ! Let the King reign.

‘ Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May !  
 Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day !  
 Clang battleaxe, and clash brand ! Let the King reign.

‘ The King will follow Christ, and we the King  
 In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing. 500  
 Fall battleaxe, and flash brand ! Let the King reign.’

So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.  
There at the banquet those great Lords from Rome,  
The slowly-fading mistress of the world,  
Strode in, and claim'd their tribute as of yore.  
But Arthur spake, 'Behold, for these have sworn  
To wage my wars, and worship me their King ;  
The old order changeth, yielding place to new ;  
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,  
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old                           510  
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,  
No tribute will we pay : ' so those great lords  
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.

And Arthur and his knighthood for a space  
Were all one will, and thro' that strength the King  
Drew in the petty princedoms under him,  
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame  
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign'd.

## GARETH AND LYNETTE

THE last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,  
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring  
Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted Pine  
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.  
'How he went down,' said Gareth, 'as a false knight  
Or evil king before my lance if lance  
Were mine to use — O senseless cataract,  
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy —  
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows  
And mine is living blood : thou dost His will,      10  
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,  
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall  
Linger with vacillating obedience,  
Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to —  
Since the good mother holds me still a child !  
Good mother is bad mother unto me !  
A worse were better ; yet no worse would I.  
Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force  
To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,  
Until she let me fly discaged to sweep      20  
In ever-highering eagle-circles up  
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop  
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,  
A knight of Arthur, working out his will,  
To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came

With Modred hither in the summertime,  
 Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.  
 Modred for want of worthier was the judge.  
 Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,  
 "Thou hast half prevail'd against me," said so — he — 30  
 Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,  
 For he is alway sullen: what care I?'

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair  
 Ask'd, 'Mother, tho' ye count me still the child,  
 Sweet mother, do ye love the child?' She laughed,  
 'Thou art but a wild-goose to question it.'  
 'Then, mother, an ye love the child,' he said,  
 'Being a goose and rather tame than wild,  
 Hear the child's story.' 'Yea, my well-beloved,  
 An 'twere but of the goose and golden eggs.' 40

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,  
 'Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine  
 Was finer gold than any goose can lay;  
 For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle, laid  
 Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm  
 As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.  
 And there was ever haunting round the palm  
 A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw  
 The splendor sparkling from aloft, and thought  
 "An I could climb and lay my hand upon it, 50  
 Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings."  
 But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,  
 One, that had loved him from his childhood, caught  
 And stay'd him, "Climb not lest thou break thy neck,  
 I charge thee by my love," and so the boy,

Sweet mother, neither clomb, nor brake his neck,  
 But brake his very heart in pining for it,  
 And past away.'

To whom the mother said,  
 ' True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,  
 And handed down the golden treasure to him.' 60

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,  
 ' Gold ? said I gold ? — ay then, why he, or she,  
 Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world  
 Had ventured — *had* the thing I spake of been  
 Mere gold — but this was all of that true steel,  
 Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,  
 And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,  
 And all the little fowl were flurried at it,  
 And there were cries and clashings in the nest,  
 That sent him from his senses : let me go.' 70

Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said,  
 ' Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness ?  
 Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth  
 Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out !  
 For ever since when traitor to the King  
 He fought against him in the Barons' war,  
 And Arthur gave him back his territory,  
 His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there  
 A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,  
 No more ; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows. 80  
 And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,  
 Albeit neither loved with that full love  
 I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love :

Stay therefore thou ; red berries charm the bird,  
 And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars,  
 Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang  
 Of wrench'd or broken limb — an often chance  
 In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,  
 Frights to my heart ; but stay : follow the deer  
 By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns ;      90  
 So make thy manhood mightier day by day ;  
 Sweet is the chase : and I will seek thee out  
 Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace  
 Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,  
 Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness  
 I know not thee, myself, nor anything.  
 Stay, my best son ! ye are yet more boy than man.'

Then Gareth, ‘An ye hold me yet for child,  
 Hear yet once more the story of the child.  
 For, mother, there was once a King, like ours.      100  
 The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,  
 Ask'd for a bride ; and thereupon the King  
 Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd —  
 But to be won by force — and many men  
 Desired her ; one, good lack, no man desired.  
 And these were the conditions of the King :  
 That save he won the first by force, he needs  
 Must wed that other, whom no man desired,  
 A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile,  
 That evermore she long'd to hide herself,      110  
 Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye —  
 Yea — some she cleaved to, but they died of her.  
 And one — they call'd her Fame ; and one, — O Mother,  
 How can ye keep me tether'd to you — Shame.

Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.  
 Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,  
 Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King—  
 Else, wherefore born?'

To whom the mother said,  
 'Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,  
 Or will not deem him, wholly proven King — 120  
 Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King,  
 When I was frequent with him in my youth,  
 And heard him Kingly speak, and doubted him  
 No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,  
 Of closest kin to me: yet — wilt thou leave  
 Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all,  
 Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?  
 Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth  
 Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son.'

And Gareth answer'd quickly, 'Not an hour,  
 So that ye yield me — I will walk thro' fire,  
 Mother, to gain it — your full leave to go.  
 Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome  
 From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd  
 The Idolaters, and made the people free?  
 Who should be King save him who makes us free?' 130

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain  
 To break him from the intent to which he grew,  
 Found her son's will unwaveringly one,  
 She answer'd craftily, 'Will ye walk thro' fire?  
 Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.  
 Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof, 14c

Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,  
 Of thine obedience and thy love to me,  
 Thy mother,— I demand.'

And Gareth cried,  
 'A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.  
 Nay — quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!'

But slowly spake the mother looking at him,  
 'Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,  
 And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks      150  
 Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,  
 And those that hand the dish across the bar.  
 Nor shalt thou tell thy name to anyone.  
 And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day.'

For so the Queen believed that when her son  
 Beheld his only way to glory lead  
 Low down thro' villain kitchen-vassalage,  
 Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud  
 To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,  
 Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.      160

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied,  
 'The thrall in person may be free in soul,  
 And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,  
 And since thou art my mother, must obey.  
 I therefore yield me freely to thy will;  
 For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself  
 To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;  
 Nor tell my name to any — no, not the King.'

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye  
 Full of the wistful fear that he would go,      170

And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,  
 Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour,  
 When waken'd by the wind which with full voice  
 Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,  
 He rose, and out of slumber calling two  
 That still had tended on him from his birth,  
 Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.  
 Southward they set their faces. The birds made  
 Melody on branch, and melody in mid air.      180  
 The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green,  
 And the live green had kindled into flowers,  
 For it was past the time of Easterday.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain  
 That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot,  
 Far off they saw the silver-misty morn  
 Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,  
 That rose between the forest and the field.  
 At times the summit of the high city flash'd;  
 At times the spires and turrets half-way down      190  
 Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the great gate shone  
 Only, that open'd on the field below:  
 Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,  
 One crying, 'Let us go no further, lord.  
 Here is a city of Enchanters, built  
 By fairy Kings.' The second echo'd him,  
 'Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home  
 To Northward, that this King is not the King,

But only changeling out of Fairyland,  
 Who drove the heathen hence by sorcery  
 And Merlin's glamour.' Then the first again,  
 'Lord, there is no such city anywhere,  
 But all a vision.'

200

Gareth answer'd them  
 With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow  
 In his own blood, his princedom, youth and hopes,  
 To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea ;  
 So push'd them all unwilling toward the gate.  
 And there was no gate like it under heaven.  
 For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined      210  
 And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,  
 The Lady of the Lake stood : all her dress  
 Wept from her sides as water flowing away ;  
 But like the cross her great and goodly arms  
 Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld :  
 And drops of water fell from either hand ;  
 And down from one a sword was hung, from one  
 A censer, either worn with wind and storm ;  
 And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish ;  
 And in the space to left of her, and right,      220  
 Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,  
 New things and old co-twisted, as if Time  
 Were nothing, so inveterately, that men  
 Were giddy gazing there ; and over all  
 High on the top were those three Queens, the friends  
 Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

220

Then those with Gareth for so long a space  
 Stared at the figures, that at last it seem'd

The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings  
 Began to move, seethe, twine, and curl : they call'd 230  
 To Gareth, 'Lord, the gateway is alive.'

And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes  
 So long, that ev'n to him they seem'd to move.  
 Out of the city a blast of music peal'd.  
 Back from the gate started the three, to whom  
 From out thereunder came an ancient man,  
 Long-bearded, saying, 'Who be ye, my sons ?'

Then Gareth, 'We be tillers of the soil,  
 Who leaving share in furrow come to see  
 The glories of our King : but these, my men, 240  
 (Your city moved so weirdly in the mist)  
 Doubt if the King be King at all, or come  
 From Fairyland ; and whether this be built  
 By magic, and by fairy Kings and Queens ;  
 Or whether there be any city at all,  
 Or all a vision : and this music now  
 Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth.'

Then that old Seer made answer playing on him  
 And saying, 'Son, I have seen the good ship sail  
 Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens, 250  
 And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:  
 And here is truth ; but an it please thee not,  
 Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.  
 For truly, as thou sayest, a Fairy King  
 And Fairy Queens have built the city, son ;  
 They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft  
 Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,

And built it to the music of their harps.  
 And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,  
 For there is nothing in it as it seems  
 Saving the King ; tho' some there be that hold  
 The King a shadow, and the city real :  
 Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass  
 Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become  
 A thrall to his enchantments, for the King  
 Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame  
 A man should not be bound by, yet the which  
 No man can keep ; but, so thou dread to swear,  
 Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide  
 Without, among the cattle of the field.

260

For an ye heard a music, like enow  
 They are building still, seeing the city is built  
 To music, therefore never built at all,  
 And therefore built for ever.'

270

Gareth spake

Anger'd, 'Old master, reverence thine own beard  
 That looks as white as utter truth, and seems  
 Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall !  
 Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been  
 To thee fair-spoken ?'

But the Seer replied.

' Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards ?  
 " Confusion, and illusion, and relation,  
 Elusion, and occasion, and evasion " ?  
 I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,  
 And all that see thee, for thou art not who  
 Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.  
 And now thou goest up to mock the King,  
 Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie.'

280

Unmockingly the mocker ending here,  
 Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain ;  
 Whom Gareth looking after said, ' My men,  
 Our onie white lie sits like a little ghost  
 Here on the threshold of our enterprise.  
 Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I :  
 Well, we will make amends.'

290

With all good cheer

He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain  
 Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces  
 And stately, rich in emblem and the work  
 Of ancient kings who did their days in stone ;  
 Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,  
 Knowing all arts, had touch'd, and everywhere      300  
 At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak  
 And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.  
 And ever and anon a knight would pass  
 Outward, or inward to the hall : his arms  
 Clash'd ; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.  
 And out of bower and casement shyly glanced  
 Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love ;  
 And all about a healthful people stept  
 As in the presence of a gracious king.

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard      310

A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld  
 Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall  
 The splendor of the presence of the King  
 Throned, and delivering doom — and look'd no more —  
 But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,  
 And thought, ' For this half-shadow of a lie

The truthful King will doom me when I speak.'  
 Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find  
 Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one  
 Nor other, but in all the listening eyes  
 Of those tall knights, that ranged about the throne,  
 Clear honor shining like the dewy star  
 Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure  
 Affection, and the light of victory,  
 And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

320

Then came a widow crying to the King,  
 'A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft  
 From my dead lord a field with violence:  
 For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,  
 Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,  
 We yielded not; and then he reft us of it  
 Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field.'

330

Said Arthur, 'Whether would ye? gold or field?'  
 To whom the woman weeping, 'Nay, my lord,  
 The field was pleasant in my husband's eye.'

And Arthur: 'Have thy pleasant field again,  
 And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,  
 According to the years. No boon is here,  
 But justice, so they say be proven true.  
 Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did  
 Would shape himself a right!'

340

And while she past,  
 Came yet another widow crying to him,  
 'A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.  
 With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,

A knight of Uther in the Barons' war,  
 When Lot and many another rose and fought  
 Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.  
 I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.  
 Yet lo ! my husband's brother had my son  
 Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead ;      350  
 And standeth seized of that inheritance  
 Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.  
 So tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,  
 Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,  
 Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son.'

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,  
 'A boon, Sir King ! I am her kinsman, I.  
 Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man.'

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,  
 'A boon, Sir King ! ev'n that thou grant her none,      360  
 This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall —  
 None ; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag.'

But Arthur, 'We sit King, to help the wrong'd  
 Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.  
 Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates !  
 The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames,  
 Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,  
 And Uther slit thy tongue : but get thee hence—  
 Lest that rough humor of the kings of old  
 Return upon me ! Thou that art her kin,      370  
 Go likewise ; lay him low and slay him not,  
 But bring him here, that I may judge the right,  
 According to the justice of the King :

Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King  
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die.'

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,  
A name of evil savor in the land,  
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore  
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines  
A field of charlock in the sudden sun      380  
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,  
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,  
Delivering, that his lord, the vassal king,  
Was ev'n upon his way to Camelot;  
For having heard that Arthur of his grace  
Had made his goodly cousin, Tristram, knight,  
And, for himself was of the greater state,  
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord  
Would yield him this large honor all the more;  
So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold,      390  
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend  
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.  
An oak-tree smoulder'd there. 'The goodly knight!  
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?'  
For, midway down the side of that long hall  
A stately pile, — whereof along the front,  
Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,  
There ran a treble range of stony shields,—  
Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd the hearth.      400  
And under every shield a knight was named:  
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall;  
When some good knight had done one noble deed,

His arms were carven only ; but if twain  
 His arms were blazon'd also ; but if none,  
 The shield was blank and bare, without a sign  
 Saving the name beneath ; and Gareth saw  
 The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,  
 And Modred's blank as death ; and Arthur cried  
 To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

410

' More like are we to reave him of his crown  
 Than make him knight because men call him king.  
 The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands  
 From war among themselves, but left them kings ;  
 Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,  
 Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd  
 Among us, and they sit within our hall.  
 But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,  
 As Mark would sully the low state of churl :  
 And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,      420  
 Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,  
 Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,  
 Silenced for ever — craven — a man of plots,  
 Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings —  
 No fault of thine : let Kay the seneschal  
 Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied —  
 Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen ! '

And many another suppliant crying came  
 With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,  
 And evermore a knight would ride away.

430

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily  
 Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,

Approach'd between them toward the King, and ask'd,  
 'A boon, Sir King,' (his voice was all ashamed),  
 'For see ye not how weak and hunger-worn  
 I seem — leaning on these? grant me to serve  
 For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves  
 A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.  
 Hereafter I will fight.'

To him the King,  
 'A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon !' 440  
 But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,  
 The master of the meats and drinks, be thine.'

He rose and past ; then Kay, a man of mien  
 Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself  
 Root-bitten by white lichen,

'Lo ye now !  
 This fellow hath broken from some Abbey, where,  
 God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,  
 However that might chance ! but an he work,  
 Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,  
 And sleeker shall he shine than any hog.' 450

Then Lancelot standing near, 'Sir Seneschal,  
 Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the  
 hounds ;  
 A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know :  
 Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,  
 High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands  
 Large, fair and fine ! — Some young lad's mystery —  
 But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy

Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,  
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him.'

Then Kay, 'What murmurest thou of mystery? 460  
Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?  
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!  
Tut, an the lad were noble, he had ask'd  
For horse and armor: fair and fine, forsooth!  
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it  
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day  
Undo thee not—and leave my man to me.'

So Gareth all for glory underwent  
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage;  
Ate with young lads his portion by the door, 470  
And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.  
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,  
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,  
Would hustle and harry him, and labor him  
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set  
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,  
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself  
With all obedience to the King, and wrought  
All kind of service with a noble ease  
That graced the lowliest act in doing it. 480  
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,  
And one would praise the love that linkt the King  
And Lancelot—how the King had saved his life  
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's—  
For Lancelot was the first in Tournament,  
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field—  
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told,

How once the wandering forester at dawn,  
 Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,  
 On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,  
 A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,      490  
 'He passes to the Isle Avilion,  
 He passes and is heal'd and cannot die' —  
 Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,  
 Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,  
 Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud  
 That first they mock'd, but, after, reverenced him.  
 Or Gareth, telling some prodigious tale  
 Of knights who sliced a red life-bubbling way  
 Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held      500  
 All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates  
 Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,  
 Charm'd; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come  
 Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind  
 Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.  
 Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,  
 So there were any trial of mastery,  
 He, by two yards in casting bar or stone  
 Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,  
 So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,      510  
 Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights  
 Clash like the coming and retiring wave,  
 And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy  
 Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;  
 But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,  
 Repentant of the word she made him swear,  
 And saddening in her childless castle, sent,

Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,  
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

520

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot  
With whom he used to play at tourney once,  
When both were children, and in lonely haunts  
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,  
And each at either dash from either end—  
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.  
He laugh'd ; he sprang. ‘Out of the smoke, at once  
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee—  
These news be mine, none other's — nay, the King's —  
Descend into the city : ’ whereon he sought  
The King alone, and found, and told him all. 530

‘ I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt  
For pastime ; yea, he said it : joust can I.  
Make me thy knight — in secret ! let my name  
Be hidd'n, and give me the first quest, I spring  
Like flame from ashes.’

Here the King's calm eye  
Fell on, and check'd, and made him flush, and bow  
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answer'd him,  
‘ Son, the good mother let me know thee here,  
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine. 540  
Make thee my knight ? my knights are sworn to vows  
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,  
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,  
And uttermost obedience to the King.’

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees,  
‘ My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.

For uttermost obedience make demand  
 Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,  
 No mellow master of the meats and drinks !  
 And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,                   550  
 But love I shall, God willing.'

And the King—

' Make thee my knight in secret ? yea, but he,  
 Our noblest brother, and our truest man,  
 And one with me in all, he needs must know.'

' Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,  
 Thy noblest and thy truest ! '

And the King—

' But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you ?  
 Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,  
 And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,  
 Than to be noised of.'

Merrily Gareth ask'd,

560

' Have I not earn'd my cake in baking of it ?  
 Let be my name until I make my name !  
 My deeds will speak : it is but for a day.'  
 So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm  
 Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly  
 Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.  
 Then, after summoning Lancelot privily,  
 ' I have given him the first quest : he is not proven.'  
 Look therefore, when he calls for this in hall,  
 Thou get to horse and follow him far away.                   570  
 Cover the lions on thy shield, and see  
 Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain.'

Then that same day there past into the hall  
 A damsel of high lineage, and a brow  
 May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,  
 Hawk-eyes ; and lightly was her slender nose  
 Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower ;  
 She into hall past with her page and cried,

‘ O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,  
 See to the foe within ! bridge, ford, beset  
 By bandits, every one that owns a tower        580  
 The Lord for half a league. Why sit ye there ?  
 Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,  
 Till ev’n the loneliest hold were all as free  
 From cursed bloodshed, as thine altar-cloth  
 From that best blood it is a sin to spill.’

‘ Comfort thyself,’ said Arthur, ‘ I nor mine  
 Rest : so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,  
 The wastest moorland of our realm shall be  
 Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.        590  
 What is thy name ? thy need ? ’

‘ My name ? ’ she said —  
 ‘ Lynette my name ; noble ; my need, a knight  
 To combat for my sister, Lyonors,  
 A lady of high lineage, of great lands,  
 And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.  
 She lives in Castle Perilous : a river  
 Runs in three loops about her living-place ;  
 And o’er it are three passings, and three knights  
 Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth  
 And of that four the mightiest, holds her stay’d        600

In her own castle, and so besieges her  
 To break her will, and make her wed with him :  
 And but delays his purport till thou send  
 To do the battle with him, thy chief man  
 Sir Lancelot whom he trusts to overthrow,  
 Then wed, with glory : but she will not wed  
 Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.  
 Now therefore have I come for Lancelot.'

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd,  
 'Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush      610  
 All wrongers of the Realm. But say, these four,  
 Who be they ? What the fashion of the men ? '

' They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,  
 The fashion of that old knight-errantry  
 Who ride abroad, and do but what they will ;  
 Courteous or bestial from the moment, such  
 As have nor law nor king ; and three of these  
 Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,  
 Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,  
 Being strong fools ; and never a whit more wise      620  
 The fourth, who alway rideth arm'd in black,  
 A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.  
 He names himself the Night and oftener Death,  
 And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,  
 And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,  
 To show that who may slay or scape the three,  
 Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.  
 And all these four be fools, but mighty men,  
 And therefore am I come for Lancelot.'

Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose,      630  
 A head with kindling eyes above the throng,  
 'A boon, Sir King — this quest !' then — for he mark'd  
 Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull —  
 'Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,  
 And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I,  
 And I can topple over a hundred such.  
 Thy promise, King,' and Arthur glancing at him,  
 Brought down a momentary brow. 'Rough, sudden,  
 And pardonable, worthy to be knight —  
 Go therefore,' and all hearers were amazed.      640

But on the damsels's forehead shame, pride, wrath  
 Slew the May-white : she lifted either arm,  
 'Fie on thee, King ! I ask'd for thy chief knight,  
 And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave.'  
 Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,  
 Fled down the lane of access to the King,  
 Took horse, descended the slope street, and past  
 The weird white gate, and paused without, beside  
 The field of tourney, murmuring 'kitchen-knave.'

Now two great entries open'd from the hall,      650  
 At one end one, that gave upon a range  
 Of level pavement where the King would pace  
 At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood ;  
 And down from this a lordly stairway sloped  
 Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers ;  
 And out by this main doorway past the King.  
 But one was counter to the hearth, and rose  
 High that the highest-crested helm could ride  
 Therethro' nor graze ; and by this entry fled

The damsel in her wrath, and on to this  
 Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door  
 King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,  
 A warhorse of the best, and near it stood  
 The two that out of north had follow'd him :  
 This bare a maiden shield, a casque ; that held  
 The horse, the spear ; whereat Sir Gareth loosed  
 A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,  
 A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,  
 And from it like a fuel-smother'd fire,  
 That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those 670  
 Dull-coated things, that making slide apart  
 Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns  
 A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.  
 So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.  
 Then as he donn'd the helm, and took the shield  
 And mounted horse and grapt a spear, of grain  
 Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipt  
 With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest  
 The people, while from out of kitchen came  
 The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd 680  
 Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,  
 Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,  
 'God bless the King, and all his fellowship !'  
 And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode  
 Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

So Gareth past with joy ; but as the cur  
 Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause  
 Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,  
 His owner, but remembers all, and growls  
 Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door

690

Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used  
To harry and hustle.

‘ Bound upon a quest

With horse and arms — the King hath past his time —  
My scullion knave ! Thralls to your work again,  
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine !  
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East ?  
Begone ! — my knave ! — belike and like enow  
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth  
So shook his wits they wander in his prime —  
Crazed ! How the villain lifted up his voice,  
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave.  
700  
Tut, he was tame and meek enow with me,  
Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.  
Well — I will after my loud knave, and learn  
Whether he know me for his master yet.  
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance  
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire —  
Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,  
Into the smoke again.’

But Lancelot said,

‘ Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,  
For that did never he whereon ye rail,  
710  
But ever meekly served the King in thee ?  
Abide : take counsel ; for this lad is great  
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword.’  
‘ Tut, tell not me,’ said Kay, ‘ ye are overfine  
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies : ’  
Then mounted, on thro’ silent faces rode  
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet  
 Mutter'd the damsel, 'Wherefore did the King      720  
 Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least  
 He might have yielded to me one of those  
 Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,  
 Rather than—O sweet heaven! O fie upon him!—  
 His kitchen-knave.'

To whom Sir Gareth drew  
 (And there were none but few goodlier than he)  
 Shining in arms, 'Damsel, the quest is mine.  
 Lead, and I follow.' She thereat, as one  
 That smells a foul-flesh'd agaric in the holt,  
 And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,      730  
 Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose  
 With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, 'Hence!  
 Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.  
 And look who comes behind,' for there was Kay.  
 'Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay.  
 We lack thee by the hearth.'

And Gareth to him,  
 'Master no more! too well I know thee, ay—  
 The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall.'  
 'Have at thee then,' said Kay: they shock'd, and Kay  
 Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,      740  
 'Lead, and I follow,' and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly  
 Behind her, and the heart of her good horse  
 Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,  
 Perforce she stay'd, and overtaken spoke.

‘What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?  
 Deem’st thou that I accept thee aught the more  
 Or love thee better, that by some device  
 Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,  
 Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master—thou!— 750  
 Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!—to me  
 Thou smellest all of kitchen as before.’

‘Damsel,’ Sir Gareth answer’d gently, ‘say  
 Whate’er ye will, but whatsoe’er ye say,  
 I leave not till I finish this fair quest,  
 Or die therefore.’

‘Ay, wilt thou finish it?  
 Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!  
 The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.  
 But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,  
 And then by such a one that thou for all      760  
 The kitchen brewis that was ever supt  
 Shalt not once dare to look him in the face.’

‘I shall assay,’ said Gareth with a smile  
 That madden’d her, and away she flash’d again  
 Down the long avenues of a boundless wood,  
 And Gareth following was again beknaved.

‘Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss’d the only way  
 Where Arthur’s men are set along the wood;  
 The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:  
 If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet,      770  
 Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?  
 Fight, an thou canst: I have miss’d the only way.’

So till the dusk that follow'd evensong  
 Rode on the two, reviler and reviled ;  
 Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,  
 Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines  
 A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink  
 To westward — in the deeps whereof a mere,  
 Round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl,  
 Under the half-dead sunset glared ; and shouts      780  
 Ascended, and there brake a servingman  
 Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,  
 'They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere.'  
 Then Gareth, ' Bound am I to right the wrong'd,  
 But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee.'  
 And when the damsel spake contemptuously,  
 'Lead, and I follow,' Gareth cried again,  
 'Follow, I lead ! ' so down among the pines  
 He plunged ; and there, blackshadow'd nigh the mere,  
 And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,      790  
 Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,  
 A stone about his neck to drown him in it.  
 Three with good blows he quieted, but three  
 Fled thro' the pines ; and Gareth loosed the stone  
 From off his neck, then in the mere beside  
 Tumbled it ; oilily bubbled up the mere.  
 Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet  
 Set him, a stalwart Baron, Arthur's friend.

' Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues  
 Had wreak'd themselves on me ; good cause is theirs      800  
 To hate me, for my wont hath ever been  
 To catch my thief, and then like vermin here  
 Drown him, and with a stone about his neck ;

And under this wan water many of them  
 Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,  
 And rise, and flickering in a grimly light  
 Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life  
 Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.  
 And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.  
 What guerdon will ye ? '

Gareth sharply spake, 810

' None ! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,  
 In uttermost obedience to the King.  
 But wilt thou yield this damsel harborage ? '

Whereat the Baron saying, ' I well believe  
 You be of Arthur's Table,' a light laugh  
 Broke from Lynette, ' Ay, truly of a truth,  
 And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave ! —  
 But deem not I accept thee aught the more,  
 Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit  
 Down on a rout of craven foresters. 820  
 A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.  
 Nay — for thou smellest of the kitchen still.  
 But an this lord will yield us harborage,  
 Well.'

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,  
 All in a full-fair manor and a rich,  
 His towers, where that day a feast had been  
 Held in high hall, and many a viand left,  
 And many a costly cate, received the three.  
 And there they placed a peacock in his pride  
 Before the damsel, and the Baron set 830  
 Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

'Meseems, that here is much courtesy,  
 Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.  
 Hear me — this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,  
 And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot  
 To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night —  
 The last a monster unsubduable  
 Of any save of him for whom I call'd —  
 Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,  
 "The quest is mine ; thy kitchen-knave am I,  
 And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I."  
 Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,  
 "Go therefore," and so gives the quest to him —  
 Him — here — a villain fitter to stick swine  
 Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,  
 Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman.'

840

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord  
 Now look'd at one and now at other, left  
 The damsel by the peacock in his pride,  
 And, seating Gareth at another board,  
 Sat down beside him, ate and then began.

850

'Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,  
 Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,  
 And whether she be mad, or else the King,  
 Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,  
 I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,  
 For strong thou art and goodly therewithal  
 And saver of my life ; and therefore now,  
 For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh  
 Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back  
 To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.

860

Thy pardon ; I but speak for thine avail,  
The saver of my life.'

And Gareth said,  
' Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,  
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell.'

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved  
Had, some brief space, convey'd them on their way  
And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,  
' Lead, and I follow.' Haughtily she replied,

' I fly no more : I allow thee for an hour.                   870  
Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,  
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks  
Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool ?  
For hard by here is one will overthrow  
And slay thee : then will I to court again,  
And shame the King for only yielding me  
My champion from the ashes of his hearth.'

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd courteously,  
' Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.  
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find                   880  
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay  
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son.'

Then to the shore of one of those long loops  
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.  
Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep ; the stream  
Full, narrow ; this a bridge of single arc  
Took at a leap ; and on the further side  
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold

In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,  
 Save that the dome was purple, and above,890  
 Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.  
 And therebefore the lawless warrior paced  
 Unarm'd, and calling, ‘ Damsel, is this he,  
 The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall ?  
 For whom we let thee pass.’ ‘ Nay, nay,’ she said,  
 ‘ Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn  
 Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here  
 His kitchen-knave : and look thou to thyself :  
 See that he fall not on thee suddenly,  
 And slay thee unarm'd : he is not knight but knave.’ 900

Then at his call, ‘ O daughters of the Dawn,  
 And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,  
 Arm me,’ from out the silken curtain-folds  
 Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls  
 In gilt and rosy raiment came : their feet  
 In dewy grasses glisten'd ; and the hair  
 All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem  
 Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.

These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield  
 Blue also, and thereon the morning star.910  
 And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,  
 Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,  
 Glorying ; and in the stream beneath him, shone  
 Immingled with Heaven's azure waveringly,  
 The gay pavilion and the naked feet,  
 His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watch'd him, ‘ Wherefore stare ye so ?  
 Thou shakest in thy fear : there yet is time :

Flee down the valley before he get to horse.  
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave.'

Said Gareth, ' Damsel, whether knave or knight, 921  
Far liefer had I fight a score of times  
Than hear thee so missay me and revile.  
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee ;  
But truly foul are better, for they send  
That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know  
That I shall overthrow him.'

And he that bore

The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge,  
' A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me !  
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn. 930  
For this were shame to do him further wrong  
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse  
And arms, and so return him to the King.  
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.  
Avoid : for it beseemeth not a knave  
To ride with such a lady.

‘ Dog, thou liest !

I spring from loftier lineage than thine own.’  
He spake ; and all at fiery speed the two  
Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear  
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once, 940  
Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult  
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,  
Fell, as if dead ; but quickly rose and drew,  
And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand  
He drove his enemy backward down the bridge,

The damsel crying, ' Well-stricken, kitchen-knave !'  
Till Gareth's shield was cloven ; but one stroke  
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

Then cried the fall'n, ' Take not my life : I yield.

And Gareth, ' So this damsel ask it of me 950

Good — I accord it easily as a grace.'

She reddening, 'Insolent scullion: I of thee?

I bound to thee for any favor ask'd ! '

'Then shall he die.' And Gareth there unlaced

His helmet as to slay him, but she shriek'd,

' Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay

One nobler than thyself.' 'Damsel, thy charge

Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,

Thy life is thine at her command. Arise

And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say 960

His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave

His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.

Myself, when I return, will plead for thee.

Thy shield is mine — farewell : and, damsel, thou

Lead, and I follow.'

And fast away she fled.

Then when he came upon her, spake, ‘ Methought,  
Knave, when I watch’d thee striking on the bridge  
The savor of thy kitchen came upon me

A little faintlier : but the wind hath changed :

I scent it twenty-fold.' And then she sang, 970

"O morning star" (not that tall felon there)

## Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness

Or some device, hast foully overthrown),

"O morning star that smilest in the blue,

O star, my morning dream hath proven true,  
Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me."

' But thou begone, take counsel, and away,  
For hard by here is one that guards a ford—  
The second brother in their fool's parable —  
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.      980  
Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave.'

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd, laughingly,  
' Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.  
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest  
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates  
Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,  
"Guard it," and there was none to meddle with it.  
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King  
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,  
To worry, and not to flee — and — knight or knave — 990  
The knave that doth thee service as full knight  
Is all as good, meseems, as any knight  
Toward thy sister's freeing.'

' Ay, Sir Knave!  
Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,  
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more.'

' Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,  
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies.'

' Ay, ay,' she said, ' but thou shalt meet thy match.'

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,  
Huge on a high red horse, and all in mail      1000

Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun  
 Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower,  
 That blows a globe of after arrowlets,  
 Ten thousand-fold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,  
 All sun ; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots  
 Before them when he turn'd from watching him.  
 He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,  
 'What doest thou, brother, in my marches here ?'  
 And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,  
 'Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall'      1010  
 Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms.'  
 'Ugh !' cried the Sun, and vizoring up a red  
 And cipher face of rounded foolishness,  
 Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,  
 Whom Gareth met mid-stream : no room was there  
 For lance or tourney-skill : four strokes they struck  
 With sword, and these were mighty ; the new knight  
 Had fear he might be shamed ; but as the Sun  
 Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,  
 The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream  
 Descended, and the Sun was washed away.      1021

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford ;  
 So drew him home ; but he that fought no more,  
 As being all bone-batter'd on the rock,  
 Yielded ; and Gareth sent him to the King.  
 'Myself when I return will plead for thee.'  
 'Lead, and I follow.' Quietly she led.  
 'Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again ?'  
 'Nay, not a point : nor art thou victor here.  
 There lies a ridge of slate across the ford ;      1030  
 His horse thereon stumbled — ay, for I saw it.

“ “O Sun ” (not this strong fool whom thou, Sir  
Knavε,

Hast overthrown thro’ mere unhappiness),  
“ O Sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,  
O moon, that layest all to sleep again,  
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.”

‘ What knowest thou of lovesong or of love ?  
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,  
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance,—

“ “O dewy flowers that open to the sun,                   1040  
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,  
Blow sweetly : twice my love hath smiled on me.”

‘ What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,  
To garnish meats with ? hath not our good King  
Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,  
A foolish love for flowers ? what stick ye round  
The pasty ? wherewithal deck the boar’s head ?  
Flowers ? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

“ “O birds, that warble to the morning sky,  
O birds that warble as the day goes by,                   1050  
Sing sweetly : twice my love hath smiled on me.”

‘ What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,  
Linnet ? what dream ye when they utter forth  
May-music growing with the growing light,  
Their sweet sun-worship ? these be for the snare  
(So runs thy fancy) these be for the spit,  
Larding and basting. See thou have not now

Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.  
There stands the third fool of their allegory.'

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,  
All in a rose-red from the west, and all  
Naked it seem'd, and glowing in the broad  
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight,  
That named himself the Star of Evening, stood.

1060

And Gareth, 'Wherfore waits the madman there  
Naked in open dayshine?' 'Nay,' she cried,  
'Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd skins  
That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave  
His armor off him, these will turn the blade.'

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge, 1070  
'O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?  
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain  
The damsel's champion?' and the damsel cried,

'No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven  
With all disaster unto thine and thee!  
For both thy younger brethren have gone down  
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;  
Art thou not old?'

'Old, damsel, old and hard,  
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys.'  
Said Gareth, 'Old, and over-bold in brag! 1080  
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star  
Can throw the Evening.'

Then that other blew  
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.

‘Approach and arm me !’ With slow steps from out  
 An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain’d  
 Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,  
 And arm’d him in old arms, and brought a helm  
 With but a drying evergreen for crest,  
 And gave a shield whereon the Star of Even  
 Half-tarnish’d and half-bright, his emblem, shone. 1090  
 But when it glitter’d o’er the saddle-bow,  
 They madly hurl’d together on the bridge ;  
 And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,  
 There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,  
 But up like fire he started : and as oft  
 As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,  
 So many a time he vaulted up again ;  
 Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,  
 Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,  
 Labor’d within him, for he seem’d as one 1100  
 That all in later, sadder age begins  
 To war against ill uses of a life,  
 But these from all his life arise, and cry,  
 ‘Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down !’  
 He half despairs ; so Gareth seem’d to strike  
 Vainly, the damsel clamoring all the while,  
 ‘Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good knight-  
 knave —  
 O knave, as noble as any of all the knights —  
 Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied —  
 Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round — 1110  
 His arms are old, he trusts the harden’d skin —  
 Strike — strike — the wind will never change again.’  
 And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,  
 And hew’d great pieces of his armor off him,

But lash'd in vain against the harden'd skin,  
 And could not wholly bring him under, more  
 Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,  
 The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs  
 For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand  
 Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.      1120  
 'I have thee now; ' but forth that other sprang,  
 And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms  
 Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,  
 Strangled, but straining ev'n his uttermost  
 Cast, and so hurl'd him headlong o'er the bridge  
 Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,  
 'Lead, and I follow.'

But the damsels said,  
 'I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;  
 Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.'

"O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,      1130  
 O rainbow with three colors after rain,  
 Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me."

'Sir,—and, good faith, I fain had added — Knight,  
 But that I heard thee call thyself a knave,—  
 Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,  
 Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King  
 Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,  
 For thou has ever answer'd courteously,  
 And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal  
 As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,      1140  
 Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art.'

'Damsel,' he said, 'you be not all to blame,  
 Saving that you mistrusted our good King  
 Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one  
 Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say;  
 Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold  
 He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet  
 To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets  
 His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat  
 At any gentle damsel's waywardness.' 1150  
 Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:  
 And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks  
 There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,  
 Hath force to quell me.'

Nigh upon that hour  
 When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,  
 Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams  
 Of goodly supper in the distant pool,  
 Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,  
 And told him of a cavern hard at hand,  
 Where bread and baken meats and good red wine 1160  
 Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors  
 Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein  
 Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse  
 Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.  
 'Sir Knavé, my knight, a hermit once was here,  
 Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock  
 The war of Time against the soul of man.  
 And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory  
 From these damp walls, and taken but the form.' 1170

Know ye not these ?' and Gareth lookt and read —  
 In letters like to those the vexillary  
 Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt —  
 'PHOSPHORUS,' then 'MERIDIES,' — 'HESPERUS' —  
 'Nox' — 'MORS,' beneath five figures, armed men,  
 Slab after slab, their faces forward all,  
 And running down the Soul, a Shape that fled  
 With broken wings, torn raiment and loose hair,  
 For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.  
 'Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,  
 Who comes behind ?'

1180

For one — delay'd at first

Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay  
 To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,  
 The damsel's headlong error thro' the wood —  
 Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops —  
 His blue shield-lions cover'd — softly drew  
 Behind the twain, and when he saw the star  
 Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,  
 'Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend.'  
 And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry ;                   1190  
 But when they closed — in a moment — at one touch  
 Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world —  
 Went sliding down so easily, and fell,  
 That when he found the grass within his hands  
 He laugh'd ; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette :  
 Harshly she ask'd him, 'Shamed and overthrown,  
 And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,  
 Why laugh ye ? that ye blew your boast in vain ?'  
 'Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son  
 Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,

1200

And victor of the bridges and the ford,  
 And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom  
 I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness —  
 Device and sorcery and unhappiness —  
 Out, sword ; we are thrown ! ' And Lancelot answer'd,  
 ' Prince,  
 O Gareth — thro' the mere unhappiness  
 Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,  
 Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole,  
 As on the day when Arthur knighted him.'

Then Gareth, ' Thou — Lancelot ! — thine the hand  
 That threw me ? An some chance to mar the boast 1211  
 Thy brethren of thee make — which could not chance —  
 Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,  
 Shamed had I been, and sad — O Lancelot — thou ! '

Whereat the maiden, petulant : ' Lancelot,  
 Why came ye not, when call'd ? and wherefore now  
 Come ye, not call'd ? I gloried in my knave,  
 Who being still rebuked, would answer still  
 Courteous as any knight — but now, if knight,  
 The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd, 1220  
 And only wondering wherefore played upon :  
 And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.  
 Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,  
 In Arthur's presence ? Knight, knave, prince and fool,  
 I hate thee and for ever.'

And Lancelot said,  
 ' Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth ! knight art thou  
 To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise

To call him shamed, who is but overthrown ?  
 Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.  
 Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last,      1230  
 And overthrower from being overthrown.  
 With sword we have not striven ; and thy good horse  
 And thou are weary ; yet not less I felt  
 Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.  
 Well hast thou done ; for all the stream is freed,  
 And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,  
 And when reviled, hast answer'd graciously,  
 And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, Knight,  
 Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round ! '

And then when turning to Lynette he told      1240  
 The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said,  
 ' Ay well — ay well — for worse than being fool'd  
 Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,  
 Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks  
 And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.  
 But all about it flies a honeysuckle.  
 Seek, till we find.' And when they sought and found,  
 Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life  
 Past into sleep ; on whom the maiden gazed.  
 ' Sound sleep be thine ! sound cause to sleep hast thou.  
 Wake lusty ! Seem I not as tender to him      1251  
 As any mother ? Ay, but such a one  
 As all day long hath rated at her child,  
 And vext his day, but blesses him asleep —  
 Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle  
 In the hush'd night, as if the world were one  
 Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness !  
 O Lancelot, Lancelot,' — and she clapt her hands —

' Full merry am I to find my goodly knave  
 Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,  
 Else yon black felon had not let me pass,  
 To bring thee back to do the battle with him.  
 Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first ;  
 Who doubts thee victor ? so will my knight-knave  
 Miss the full flower of this accomplishment.'

Said Lancelot : ' Peradventure, he you name,  
 May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,  
 Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,  
 Not to be spurr'd, loving the battle as well  
 As he that rides him.' ' Lancelot-like,' she said,  
 ' Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all.'

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield ;  
 ' Ramp ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears  
 Are rotten sticks ! ye seem agape to roar !  
 Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord ! —  
 Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.  
 O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these  
 Streams virtue — fire — thro' one that will not shame  
 Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.  
 Hence : let us go.'

Silent the silent field  
 They traversed. Arthur's Harp tho' summer-wan,  
 In counter motion to the clouds, allured  
 The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.  
 A star shot : ' Lo,' said Gareth, ' the foe falls ! '  
 An owl whoopt : ' Hark the victor pealing there ! '  
 Suddenly she that rode upon his left

Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying,  
 ' Yield, yield him this again : 'tis he must fight :  
 I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday  
 Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now 1290  
 To lend thee horse and shield : wonders ye have done ;  
 Miracles ye cannot : here is glory enow  
 In having flung the three : I see thee maim'd,  
 Mangled : I swear thou canst not fling the fourth.'

' And wherefore, damsel ? tell me all ye know.  
 You cannot scare me ; nor rough face, or voice,  
 Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery  
 Appal me from the quest.'

' Nay, Prince,' she cried,  
 ' God wot, I never look'd upon the face,  
 Seeing he never rides abroad by day ; 1300  
 But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass  
 Chilling the night : nor have I heard the voice.  
 Always he made his mouthpiece of a page  
 Who came and went, and still reported him  
 As closing in himself the strength of ten,  
 And when his anger tare him, massacring  
 Man, woman, lad and girl — yea, the soft babe !  
 Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,  
 Monster ! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first,  
 The quest is Lancelot's : give him back the shield.' 1310

Said Gareth laughing, ' An he fight for this,  
 Belike he wins it as the better man :  
 Thus — and not else ! '

But Lancelot on him urged  
 All the devisings of their chivalry  
 When one might meet a mightier than himself ;  
 How best to manage horse, lance, sword and shield,  
 And so fill up the gap where force might fail  
 With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth, 'Here be rules. I know but one —  
 To dash against mine enemy and to win.'      1320  
 Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,  
 And seen thy way.' 'Heaven help thee !' sigh'd Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew  
 To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode  
 In converse till she made her palfrey halt,  
 Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, 'There.'  
 And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd  
 Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,  
 A huge pavilion like a mountain peak  
 Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,      1330  
 Black, with black banner, and a long black horn  
 Beside it hanging ; which Sir Gareth graspt,  
 And so, before the two could hinder him,  
 Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.  
 Echo'd the walls, a light twinkled ; anon  
 Came lights and lights, and once again he blew ;  
 Whereon were hollow tramplings up and down  
 And muffled voices heard, and shadows past ;  
 Till high above him, circled with her maids,  
 The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,      1340  
 Beautiful among lights, and waving to him  
 White hands, and courtesy ; but when the Prince

Three times had blown — after long hush — at last —  
 The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,  
 Thro' those black foldings, that which housed therein.  
 High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms,  
 With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,  
 And crown'd with fleshless laughter — some ten steps —  
 In the half-light — thro' the dim dawn — advanced  
 The monster, and then paused, and spake no word. 1350

But Gareth spake and all indignantly,  
 ' Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,  
 Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,  
 But must, to make the terror of thee more,  
 Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries  
 Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,  
 Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers  
 As if for pity ? ' But he spake no word ;  
 Which set the horror higher : a maiden swoon'd ;  
 The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,      1360  
 As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death ;  
 Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm ;  
 And even Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt  
 Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd,  
 And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.  
 Then those that did not blink the terror, saw  
 That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.  
 But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.  
 Half fell to right and half to left and lay.      1370  
 Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm  
 As throughly as the skull ; and out from this

Issued the bright face of a blooming boy  
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, ‘ Knight,  
Slay me not : my three brethren bad me do it,  
To make a horror all about the house,  
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors.  
They never dream’d the passes would be past.’  
Answer’d Sir Gareth graciously to one  
Not many a moon his younger, ‘ My fair child,      1380  
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight  
Of Arthur’s hall?’ ‘ Fair Sir, they bad me do it.  
They hate the King, and Lancelot, the King’s friend,  
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,  
They never dream’d the passes could be past.’

Then sprang the happier day from underground ;  
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance  
And revel and song, made merry over Death,  
As being after all their foolish fears  
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.      1390  
So large mirth lived and Gareth won the quest.

And he that told the tale in older times  
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,  
But he, that told it later, says Lynette.

## LANCELOT AND ELAINE

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the lovable,  
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,  
High in her chamber up a tower to the east  
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot ;  
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray  
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam ;  
Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it  
A case of silk, and braided thereupon  
All the devices blazon'd on the shield  
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,      10  
A border fantasy of branch and flower,  
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.  
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,  
Leaving her household and good father, climb'd  
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,  
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,  
. Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,  
Now made a pretty history to herself  
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,  
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,      20  
Conjecturing when and where : this cut is fresh ;  
That ten years back ; this dealt him at Caerlyle ;  
That at Caerleon ; this at Camelot :  
And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there !  
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God

Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,  
And saved him : so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield  
Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name ?  
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt  
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,  
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name  
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize. 30

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him King,  
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,  
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.  
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave  
Like its own mists to all the mountain side :  
For here two brothers, one a king, had met  
And fought together ; but their names were lost ; 40  
And each had slain his brother at a blow ;  
And down they fell and made the glen abhor'd :  
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,  
And lichen'd into color with the crags :  
And he, that once was king, had on a crown  
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.  
And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass,  
All in a misty moonshine, unawares  
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull  
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown 50  
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims  
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn :  
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,  
And set it on his head, and in his heart  
Heard murmurs, 'Lo, thou likewise shalt be King.'

Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems  
 Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights  
 Saying, 'These jewels, whereupon I chanced  
 Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's —  
 For public use : henceforward let there be,      60  
 Once every year, a joust for one of these :  
 For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn  
 Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow  
 In use of arms and manhood, till we drive  
 The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land  
 Hereafter, which God hinder.' Thus he spoke :  
 And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still  
 Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,  
 With purpose to present them to the Queen,  
 When all were won ; but meaning all at once      70  
 To snare her royal fancy with a boon  
 Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last  
 And largest, Arthur, holding then his court  
 Hard on the river nigh the place which now  
 Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust  
 At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh  
 Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,  
 'Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move  
 To these fair jousts?' 'Yea, lord,' she said, 'ye know it.' 80  
 'Then will ye miss,' he answer'd, 'the great deeds  
 Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,  
 A sight ye love to look on.' And the Queen  
 Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly  
 On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.  
 He thinking that he read her meaning there,

' Stay with me, I am sick ; my love is more  
 Than many diamonds,' yielded ; and a heart  
 Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen  
 (However much he yearn'd to make complete  
 The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)      90  
 Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,  
 ' Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,  
 And lets me from the saddle ; ' and the King  
 Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.  
 No sooner gone than suddenly she began :

' To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame !  
 Why go ye not to these fair jousts ? the knights  
 Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd  
 Will murmur, " Lo the shameless ones, who take      100  
 Their pastime now the trustful King is gone ! " ' Then Lancelot vext at having lied in vain :  
 ' Are ye so wise ? ye were not once so wise,  
 My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.  
 Then of the crowd ye took no more account  
 Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,  
 When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,  
 And every voice is nothing. As to knights,  
 Them surely can I silence with all ease.  
 But now my loyal worship is allow'd      110  
 Of all men : many a bard, without offence,  
 Has link'd our names together in his lay,  
 Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,  
 The pearl of beauty : and our knights at feast  
 Have pledged us in this union, while the King  
 Would listen smiling. How then ? is there more ?  
 Has Arthur spoken aught ? or would yourself,

Now weary of my service and devoir,  
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord ?'

She broke into a little scornful laugh :  
 ' Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,  
 That passionate perfection, my good lord —  
 But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven ?  
 He never spake word of reproach to me,  
 He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,  
 He cares not for me : only here to-day  
 There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes :  
 Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him — else  
 Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,  
 And swearing men to vows impossible,  
 To make them like himself : but, friend, to me  
 He is all fault who hath no fault at all :  
 For who loves me must have a touch of earth ;  
 The low sun makes the color : I am yours,  
 Nor Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.  
 And therefore hear my words : go to the jousts :  
 The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream  
 When sweetest ; and the vermin voices here  
 May buzz so loud — we scorn them, but they sting.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights :  
 ' And with what face, after my pretext made,  
 Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I  
 Before a King who honors his own word,  
 As if it were his God's ? '

' Yea,' said the Queen,  
 ' A moral child without the craft to rule,  
 Else had he not lost me : but listen to me,

If I must find you wit: we hear it said  
 That men go down before your spear at a touch,  
 But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,  
 This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown:  
 Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King  
 Will then allow your prefext, O my knight,  
 As all for glory; for to speak him true,  
 Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,  
 No keener hunter after glory breathes.  
 He loves it in his knights more than himself:  
 They prove to him his work: win and return.'

150

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,  
 Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,  
 He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,  
 Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,  
 And there among the solitary downs,  
 Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;  
 Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,  
 That all in loops and links among the dales  
 Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw  
 Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.  
 Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.  
 Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,  
 Who let him into lodging and disarm'd.  
 And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man;  
 And issuing found the Lord of Astolat  
 With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,  
 Moving to meet him in the castle court;  
 And close behind them stept the lily maid  
 Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house  
 There was not: some light jest among them rose

160

170

With laughter dying down as the great knight  
 Approach'd them : then the Lord of Astolat :  
 ' Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name 180  
 Livest between the lips ? for by thy state  
 And presence I might guess thee chief of those,  
 After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.  
 Him have I seen : the rest, his Table Round,  
 Known as they are, to me they are unknown.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights :  
 ' Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,  
 What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.  
 But since I go to joust as one unknown  
 At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not, 190  
 Hereafter ye shall know me — and the shield —  
 I pray you lend me one, if such you have,  
 Blank, or at least with some device not mine.'

Then said the Lord of Astolat, ' Here is Torre's :  
 Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre.  
 And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.  
 His ye can have.' Then added plain Sir Torre,  
 ' Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.'  
 Here laugh'd the father saying, ' Fie, Sir Churl,  
 Is that an answer for a noble knight ? 200  
 Allow him ! but Lavaine, my younger here,  
 He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,  
 Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,  
 And set it in this damsel's golden hair,  
 To make her thrice as wilful as before.'

' Nay, father, nay good father, shame me not  
 Before this noble knight,' said young Lavaine,

' For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre :  
 He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go :  
 A jest, no more ! for, knight, the maiden dreamt  
 That some one put this diamond in her hand,  
 And that it was too slippery to be held,  
 And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,  
 The castle-well, belike ; and then I said  
 That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it  
 (But all was jest and joke among ourselves)  
 Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.  
 But, father, give me leave, an if he will,  
 To ride to Camelot with this noble knight :  
 Win shall I not, but do my best to win :  
 Young as I am, yet would I do my best.'

220

' So ye will grace me,' answer'd Lancelot,  
 Smiling a moment, 'with your fellowship  
 O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,  
 Then were I glad of you as guide and friend :  
 And you shall win this diamond,— as I hear  
 It is a fair large diamond,— if ye may,  
 And yield it to this maiden, if ye will.'  
 ' A fair large diamond,' added plain Sir Torre,  
 ' Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.'      230  
 Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,  
 Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,  
 Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement  
 Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,  
 Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd :  
 ' If what is fair be but for what is fair,  
 And only queens are to be counted so,  
 Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid

Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,  
Not violating the bond of like to like.'

240

He spoke and ceased : the lily maid Elaine,  
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,  
Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.  
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,  
In battle with the love he bare his lord,  
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.  
Another sinning on such heights with one,  
The flower of all the west and all the world,  
Had been the sleeker for it : but in him  
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose  
And drove him into wastes and solitudes  
For agony, who was yet a living soul.  
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man  
That ever among ladies ate in hall,  
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.  
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,  
Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,  
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes  
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

250

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,  
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall  
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain  
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,  
But kindly man moving among his kind :  
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best  
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.  
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,  
And ever well and readily answer'd he :

260

But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,  
 Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,      270  
 Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,  
 The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.  
 'He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design  
 Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd ;  
 But I, my sons, and little daughter fled  
 From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods  
 By the great river in a boatman's hut.  
 Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke  
 The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.'

'O there, great lord, doubtless,' Lavaine said, rapt 280  
 By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth  
 Toward greatness in its elder, 'you have fought.  
 O tell us — for we live apart — you know  
 Of Arthur's glorious wars.' And Lancelot spoke  
 And answer'd him at full, as having been  
 With Arthur in the fight which all day long  
 Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem ;  
 And in the four loud battles by the shore  
 Of Duglas ; that on Bassa ; then the war  
 That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts      290  
 Of Celidon the forest ; and again  
 By Castle Gurnion, where the glorious King  
 Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,  
 Carved of one emerald center'd in a sun  
 Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed ;  
 And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,  
 When the strong neighings of the wild White Horse  
 Set every gilded parapet shuddering ;  
 And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,

And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit, 300  
 Where many a heathen fell ; ' and on the mount  
 Of Badon I myself beheld the King  
 Charge at the head of all his Table Round,  
 And all his legions crying Christ and him,  
 And break them ; and I saw him, after, stand  
 High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume  
 Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,  
 And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,  
 " They are broken, they are broken ! " for the King,  
 However mild he seems at home, nor cares 310  
 For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts —  
 For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs  
 Saying, his knights are better men than he —  
 Yet in this heathen war the fire of God  
 Fills him : I never saw his like : there lives  
 No greater leader.'

While he utter'd this,  
 Low to her own heart said the lily maid,  
 ' Save your great self, fair lord ; ' and when he fell  
 From talk of war to traits of pleasantry —  
 Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind — 320  
 She still took note that when the living smile  
 Died from his lips, across him came a cloud  
 Of melancholy severe, from which again,  
 Whenever in her hovering to and fro  
 The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,  
 There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness  
 Of manners and of nature : and she thought  
 That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.  
 And all night long his face before her lived,

- As when a painter, poring on a face,  
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man  
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,  
The shape and color of a mind and life,  
Lives for his children, ever at its best  
And fullest; so the face before her lived,  
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full  
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.  
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought  
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
- First as in fear, step after step, she stole  
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:  
Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,  
'This shield, my friend, where is it?' and Lavaine  
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.  
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd  
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.  
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew  
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed  
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw  
The maiden standing in the dewy light.
- He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.  
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,  
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood  
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.  
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,  
That he should wear her favor at the tilt.  
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.  
'Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,  
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear  
My favor at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he,
- 'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
- 330
- 340
- 350
- 360

Favor of any lady in the lists.

Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'

' Yea, so,' she answer'd ; ' then in wearing mine  
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,

That those who know should know you.' And he turn'd  
Her counsel up and down within his mind,

And found it true, and answer'd, ' True, my child.

Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me :

What is it?' and she told him, ' A red sleeve      370

Broider'd with pearls,' and brought it : then he bound  
Her token on his helmet, with a smile

Saying, ' I never yet have done so much

For any maiden living,' and the blood

Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight;

But left her all the paler, when Lavaine

Returning brought the yet-unblazoned shield,

His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,

Who parted with his own to fair Elaine :

' Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield      380

In keeping till I come.' ' A grace to me,'

She answer'd, ' twice to-day. I am your squire ! '

Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, ' Lily maid,

For fear our people call you lily maid

In earnest, let me bring your color back ;

Once, twice, and thrice : now get you hence to bed : '

So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,

And thus they moved away : she stay'd a minute,

Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there —

Her bright hair blown about the serious face      390

Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss —

Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield

In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off

Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.  
 Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,  
 There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away  
 Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,  
 To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight  
 Not far from Camelot, now for forty years  
 A hermit, who had pray'd, labor'd and pray'd,  
 And ever laboring had scoop'd himself  
 In the white rock a chapel and a hall  
 Of massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,  
 And cells and chambers : all were fair and dry ;  
 The green light from the meadows underneath  
 Struck up and lived along the milky roofs ;  
 And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees  
 And poplars made a noise of falling showers.  
 And thither wending there that night they bode.

400

410

But when the next day broke from underground,  
 And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,  
 They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away :  
 Then Lancelot saying, ' Hear, but hold my name  
 Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,'  
 Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,  
 Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,  
 But left him leave to stammer, ' Is it indeed ? '  
 And after muttering ' The great Lancelot,'  
 At last he got his breath and answer'd, ' One,  
 One have I seen — that other, our liege lord,  
 The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,  
 Of whom the people talk mysteriously,

420

He will be there — then were I stricken blind  
That minute, I might say that I had seen.'

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists  
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes  
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round  
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,  
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat      430  
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,  
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,  
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,  
And from the carven-work behind him crept  
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make  
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them  
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable  
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found  
The new design wherein they lost themselves,  
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work :      440  
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,  
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,  
' Me you call great : mine is the firmer seat,  
The truer lance : but there is many a youth  
Now crescent, who will come to all I am  
And overcome it ; and in me there dwells  
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
Of greatness to know well I am not great :  
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped upon him      450  
As on a thing miraculous, and anon  
The trumpets blew ; and then did either side,  
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,

Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,  
 Meet in the midst, and there so furiously  
 Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,  
 If any man that day were left afield,  
 The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.  
 And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw  
 Which were the weaker ; then he hurl'd into it      460  
 Against the stronger : little need to speak  
 Of Lancelot in his glory ! King, duke, earl,  
 Count, baron — whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,  
 Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,  
 Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight  
 Should do and almost overdo the deeds  
 Of Lancelot ; and one said to the other, ' Lo !  
 What is he ? I do not mean the force alone —  
 The grace and versatility of the man !      470  
 Is it not Lancelot ? ' ' When has Lancelot worn  
 Favor of any lady in the lists ?  
 Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.'  
 ' How then ? who then ? ' a fury seized them all,  
 A fiery family passion for the name  
 Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.  
 They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and  
 thus,  
 Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made  
 In moving, all together down upon him  
 Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,      480  
 Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all  
 Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,  
 Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,

And him that helms it, so they overbore  
 Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear  
 Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear  
 Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head  
 Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt, and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully ;  
 He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,      490  
 And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.  
 He up the side, sweating with agony, got,  
 But thought to do while he might yet endure,  
 And being lustily holpen by the rest,  
 His party, — tho' it seem'd half-miracle  
 To those he fought with, — drove his kith and kin,  
 And all the Table Round that held the lists,  
 Back to the barrier ; then the trumpets blew  
 Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve  
 Of scarlet, and the pearls ; and all the knights,      500  
 His party, cried ‘ Advance and take thy prize  
 The diamond ; ’ but he answer'd, ‘ Diamond me  
 No diamonds ! for God's love, a little air !  
 Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death !  
 Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not.’

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field  
 With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.  
 There from his charger down he slid, and sat,  
 Gasping to Sir Lavaine, ‘ Draw the lance-head : ’  
 ‘ Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot,’ said Lavaine,      510  
 ‘ I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.’  
 But he, ‘ I die already with it : draw —  
 Draw,’ — and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave

A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,  
 And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank  
 For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.  
 Then came the hermit out and bare him in,  
 There stanch'd his wound ; and there, in daily doubt  
 Whether to live or die, for many a week  
 Hid from the wild world's rumor by the grove      520  
 Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,  
 And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,  
 His party, knights of utmost North and West,  
 Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,  
 Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,  
 'Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,  
 Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize  
 Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'  
 'Heaven hinder,' said the King, 'that such an one,      530  
 So great a knight as we have seen to-day —  
 He seem'd to me another Lancelot —  
 Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot —  
 He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,  
 O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.  
 Wounded and wearied needs must he be near.  
 I charge you that you get at once to horse.  
 And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you.  
 Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given :  
 His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him      540  
 No customary honor : since the knight  
 Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,  
 Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take  
 This diamond, and deliver it, and return,

And bring us where he is, and how he fares,  
And cease not from your quest until ye find.'

So saying, from the carven flower above,  
To which it made a restless heart, he took,  
And gave, the diamond : then from where he sat  
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,  
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince  
In the mid might and flourish of his May,  
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,  
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint  
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal  
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,  
Nor often loyal to his word, and now  
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth  
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave  
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

550

560

So all in wrath he got to horse and went ;  
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,  
Past, thinking ' Is it Lancelot who hath come  
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain  
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,  
And ridd'n away to die ? ' So fear'd the King,  
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.  
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,  
' Love, are you yet so sick ? ' ' Nay, lord,' she said.  
' And where is Lancelot ? ' Then the Queen amazed, 570  
' Was he not with you ? won he not your prize ? '  
' Nay, but one like him.' ' Why that like was he.'  
And when the King demanded how she knew,  
Said, ' Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,

Than Lancelot told me of a common talk  
 That men went down before his spear at a touch,  
 But knowing he was Lancelot ; his great name  
 Conquer'd ; and therefore would he hide his name  
 From all men, ev'n the King, and to this end  
 Had made the pretext of a hindering wound,      580  
 That he might joust unknown of all, and learn  
 If his old prowess were in aught decay'd ;  
 And added, "Our true Arthur, when he learns,  
 Will well allow my pretext, as for gain  
 Of purer glory."

Then replied the King :

' Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,  
 In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,  
 To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.  
 Surely his King and most familiar friend  
 Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,      590  
 Albeit I know my knights fantastical,  
 So fine a fear in our large Lancelot  
 Must needs have moved my laughter : now remains  
 But little cause for laughter : his own kin —  
 Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this ! —  
 His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him ;  
 So that he went sore wounded from the field :  
 Yet good news too : for goodly hopes are mine  
 That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.  
 He wore, against his wont, upon his helm      600  
 A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,  
 Some gentle maiden's gift.'

' Yea, lord,' she said,  
 ' Thy hopes are mine,' and saying that, she choked,

And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,  
 Past to her chamber, and there flung herself  
 Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,  
 And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,  
 And shriek'd out 'Traitor' to the unhearing wall,  
 Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,  
 And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

610

Gawain the while thro' all the region round  
 Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,  
 Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,  
 And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat :  
 Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid  
 Glanced at, and cried, ' What news from Camelot,  
 lord ?

What of the knight with the red sleeve ? ' ' He won .'  
 ' I knew it , ' she said. ' But parted from the jousts  
 Hurt in the side , ' whereat she caught her breath ;  
 Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go ;      620  
 Thereon she smote her hand : wellnigh she swooned :  
 And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came  
 The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince  
 Reported who he was, and on what quest  
 Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find  
 The victor, but had ridd'n a random round  
 To seek him, and had wearied of the search.  
 To whom the Lord of Astolat, ' Bide with us,  
 And ride no more at random, noble Prince !  
 Here was the knight, and here he left a shield ;      630  
 This will he send or come for : furthermore  
 Our son is with him ; we shall hear anon,  
 Needs must we hear .' To this the courteous Prince

Accorded with his wonted courtesy,  
 Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,  
 And stay'd ; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine :  
 Where could be found face daintier ? then her shape  
 From forehead down to foot, perfect — again  
 From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd :  
 ‘ Well — if I bide, lo ! this wild flower for me ! ’      640  
 And oft they met among the garden yews,  
 And there he set himself to play upon her  
 With sallying wit, free flashes from a height  
 Above her, graces of the court, and songs,  
 Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence  
 And amorous adulation, till the maid  
 Rebell'd against it, saying to him, ‘ Prince,  
 O loyal nephew of our noble King,  
 Why ask you not to see the shield he left,  
 Whence you might learn his name ? Why slight your  
 King,      650  
 And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove  
 No surer than our falcon yesterday,  
 Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went  
 To all the winds ? ’ ‘ Nay, by mine head,’ said he,  
 ‘ I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,  
 O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes ;  
 But an ye will it let me see the shield.’  
 And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw  
 Sir Lancelot’s azure lions, crown’d with gold,  
 Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd : 660  
 ‘ Right was the King ! our Lancelot ! that true man ! ’  
 ‘ And right was I,’ she answer'd merrily, ‘ I,  
 Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all.’  
 ‘ And if *I* dream'd,’ said Gawain, ‘ that you love

This greatest knight, your pardon ! lo; ye know it !  
 Speak therefore : shall I waste myself in vain ?'  
 Full simple was her answer, ' What know I ?  
 My brethren have been all my fellowship ;  
 And I, when often they have talk'd of love,  
 Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,      670  
 Meseem'd, of what they knew not ; so myself —  
 I know not if I know what true love is,  
 But if I know, then, if I love not him,  
 I know there is none other I can love.'

' Yea, by God's death,' said he, ' ye love him well,  
 But would not, knew ye what all others know,  
 And whom he loves.' ' So be it,' cried Elaine,  
 And lifted her fair face and moved away :

But he pursued her, calling, ' Stay a little !  
 One golden minute's grace ! he wore your sleeve :      680  
 Would he break faith with one I may not name ?  
 Must our true man change like a leaf at last ?  
 Nay — like enow : why then, far be it from me  
 To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves !  
 And, damsel, for I deem you know full well  
 Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave  
 My quest with you ; the diamond also : here !  
 For if you love, it will be sweet to give it ;  
 And if he love, it will be sweet to have it  
 From your own hand ; and whether he love or not,      690  
 A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well.  
 A thousand times ! — a thousand times farewell !  
 Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two  
 May meet at court hereafter : there, I think,  
 So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,  
 We two shall know each other.'

Then he gave,  
 And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,  
 The diamond, and all wearied of the quest  
 Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went  
 A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

700

Thence to the court he past ; there told the King  
 What the King knew, 'Sir Lancelot is the knight.'  
 And added, 'Sire, my liege, so much I learnt ;  
 But fail'd to find him, tho' I rode all round  
 The region : but I lighted on the maid  
 Whose sleeve he wore ; she loves him ; and to her,  
 Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,  
 I gave the diamond : she will render it ;  
 For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.'

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied, 710  
 ' Too courteous truly ! ye shall go no more  
 On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget  
 Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.'

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,  
 For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,  
 Linger'd that other, staring after him ;  
 Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad  
 About the maid of Astolat, and her love.  
 All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed :  
 ' The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot, 720  
 Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'  
 Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all  
 Had marvel what the maid might be, but most  
 Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame

Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.  
 She, that had heard the noise of it before,  
 But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,  
 Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.  
 So ran the tale like fire about the court,  
 Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared:      730  
 Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice  
 Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,  
 And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid  
 Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat  
 With lips severely placid, felt the knot  
 Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen  
 Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor  
 Beneath the banquet, where the meats became  
 As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,      740  
 Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept  
 The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,  
 Crept to her father, while he mused alone,  
 Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,  
 'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault  
 Is yours who let me have my will, and now,  
 Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'  
 'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'  
 She answer'd, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'  
 'Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:      750  
 Bide,' answer'd he: 'we needs must hear anon  
 Of him, and of that other.' 'Ay,' she said,  
 'And of that other, for I needs must hence  
 And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,  
 And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,

Lest I be found as faithless in the quest  
 As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.  
 Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams  
 Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
 Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.      760  
 The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,  
 My father, to be sweet and serviceable  
 To noble knights in sickness, as ye know  
 When these have worn their tokens : let me hence  
 I pray you.' Then her father nodding said,  
 ' Ay, ay, the diamond : wit ye well, my child,  
 Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,  
 Being our greatest : yea, and you must give it —  
 And sure I think this fruit is hung too high  
 For any mouth to gape for save a queen's —      770  
 Nay, I mean nothing : so then, get you gone,  
 Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,  
 And while she made her ready for her ride,  
 Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,  
 ' Being so very wilful you must go,'  
 And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,  
 ' Being so very wilful you must die.'  
 But she was happy enough and shook it off,  
 As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us ;      780  
 And in her heart she answer'd it and said,  
 ' What matter, so I help him back to life ? '  
 Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide  
 Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs  
 To Camelot, and before the city-gates  
 Came on her brother with a happy face

Making a roan horse caper and curvet  
For pleasure all about a field of flowers :  
Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,  
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?' He amazed, 790  
'Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!  
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?'  
But when the maid had told him all her tale,  
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods  
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,  
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,  
Past up the still rich city to his kin,  
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot ;  
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove  
Led to the caves : there first she saw the casque 800  
Of Lancelot on the wall : her scarlet sleeve,  
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,  
Stream'd from it still ; and in her heart she laugh'd,  
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,  
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.  
And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,  
His battle-writthen arms and mighty hands  
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream  
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.  
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,  
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself, 810  
Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.  
The sound not wonted in a place so still  
Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes  
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,  
'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King :'  
His eyes glisten'd : she fancied 'Is it for me?'  
And when the maid had told him all the tale

Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest  
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt  
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,  
And laid the diamond in his open hand.  
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child  
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.  
At once she slipt like water to the floor.  
'Alas,' he said, 'your ride hath wearied you.  
Rest must you have.' 'No rest for me,' she said ;  
'Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.'  
What might she mean by that ? his large black eyes,  
Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her,  
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself  
In the heart's colors on her simple face ;  
And Lancelot look'd and was perplext in mind,  
And being weak in body said no more ;  
But did not love the color ; woman's love,  
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd  
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,  
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates  
Far up the dim rich city to her kin ; 840  
There bode the night : but woke with dawn, and past  
Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,  
Thence to the cave : so day by day she past  
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro  
Gliding, and every day she tended him,  
And likewise many a night : and Lancelot  
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt  
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times  
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem

Uncourteous, even he : but the meek maid  
 Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him  
 Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,  
 Milder than any mother to a sick child,  
 And never woman yet, since man's first fall,  
 Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love  
 Upbore her ; till the hermit, skill'd in all  
 The simples and the science of that time,  
 Told him that her fine care had saved his life.  
 And the sick man forgot her simple blush,  
 Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,  
 Would listen for her coming and regret  
 Her parting step, and held her tenderly,  
 And loved her with all love except the love  
 Of man and woman when they love their best,  
 Closest and sweetest, and had died the death  
 In any knightly fashion for her sake.  
 And peradventure had he seen her first  
 She might have made this and that other world  
 Another world for the sick man ; but now  
 The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,  
 His honor rooted in dishonor stood,  
 And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

850

860

870

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made  
 Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.  
 These, as but born of sickness, could not live :  
 For when the blood ran lustier in him again,  
 Full often the bright image of one face,  
 Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,  
 Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.

    en if the maiden, while that ghostly grace

880

Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,  
 Or short and coldly, and she knew right well  
 What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant  
 She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,  
 And drove her ere her time across the fields  
 Far into the rich city, where alone  
 She murmur'd, 'Vain, in vain: it cannot be.  
 He will not love me: how then? must I die?'  
 Then as a little helpless innocent bird,  
 That has but one plain passage of few notes,      890  
 Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er  
 For all an April morning, till the ear  
 Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid  
 Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die? '  
 And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,  
 And found no ease in turning or in rest;  
 And 'Him or death,' she mutter'd, 'death or him,'  
 Again and like a burthen, 'Him or death.'

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,  
 To Astolat returning rode the three.

900

There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self  
 In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,  
 She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought  
 'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,  
 If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.'  
 And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid  
 That she should ask some goodly gift of him  
 For her own self or hers; 'and do not shun  
 To speak the wish most near to your true heart;  
 Such service have ye done me that I make      910  
 My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I'

In mine own land, and what I will I can.'  
 Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,  
 But like a ghost without the power to speak.  
 And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,  
 And bode among them yet a little space  
 Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced  
 He found her in among the garden yews,  
 And said, 'Delay no longer, speak your wish,  
 Seeing I go to-day:' then out she brake:      920  
 'Going? and we shall never see you more.  
 And I must die for want of one bold word.'  
 'Speak: that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'  
 Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:  
 'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.'  
 'Ah, sister,' answer'd Lancelot, 'what is this?'  
 And innocently extending her white arms,  
 'Your love,' she said, 'your love — to be your wife.'  
 And Lancelot answer'd, 'Had I chosen to wed,  
 I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine:      930  
 But now there never will be wife of mine.'  
 'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,  
 But to be with you still, to see your face,  
 To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world.'  
 And Lancelot answer'd, 'Nay, the world, the world,  
 All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart  
 To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue  
 To blare its own interpretation — nay,  
 Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,  
 And your good father's kindness.' And she said,      940  
 'Not to be with you, not to see your face —  
 Alas for me then, my good days are done.'  
 'Nay, noble maid,' he answer'd, 'ten times nay!'

This is not love : but love's first flash in youth,  
 Most common : yea, I know it of mine own self :  
 And you yourself will smile at your own self  
 Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life  
 To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age :  
 And then will I, for true you are and sweet  
 Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,  
 More specially should your good knight be poor,  
 Endow you with broad land and territory  
 Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,  
 So that would make you happy : furthermore,  
 Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,  
 In all your quarrels will I be your knight.  
 This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,  
 And more than this I cannot.'

950

While he spoke  
 She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale  
 Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied :  
 ' Of all this will I nothing ; ' and so fell,  
 And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

960

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of yew  
 Their talk had pierced, her father : ' Ay, a flash,  
 I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.  
 Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.  
 I pray you, use some rough courtesy  
 To blunt or break her passion.'

Lancelot said,  
 ' That were against me : what I can I will ; '  
 And there that day remain'd, and toward even

970

Sent for his shield : full meekly rose the maid,  
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield ;  
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,  
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd  
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.  
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound ;  
And she by tact of love was well aware  
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.  
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,  
Nor bad farewell, but sadly rode away.                   980  
This was the one courtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat :  
His very shield was gone ; only the case,  
Her own poor work, her empty labor, left.  
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd  
And grew between her and the pictured wall.  
Then came her father, saying in low tones,  
' Have comfort,' whom she greeted quietly.  
Then came her brethren saying, ' Peace to thee,  
Sweet sister,' whom she answer'd with all calm.                   990  
But when they left her to herself again,  
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field  
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd ; the owls  
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt  
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms  
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,  
And call'd her song ' The Song of Love and Death,'  
And sang it : sweetly could she make and sing.

'Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain ;      1000  
 And sweet is death who puts an end to pain :  
 I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.'

'Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must be :  
 Love, thou art bitter ; sweet is death to me.  
 O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.'

'Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,  
 Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,  
 I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.'

'I fain would follow love, if that could be ;  
 I needs must follow death, who calls for me ;      1010  
 Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die.'

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,  
 All in a fiery dawning wild with wind  
 That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought  
 With shuddering, 'Hark the Phantom of the house  
 That ever shrieks before a death,' and call'd  
 The father, and all three in hurry and fear  
 Ran to her, and lo ! the blood-red light of dawn  
 Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die !'

As when we dwell upon a word we know,      1020  
 Repeating, till the word we know so well  
 Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,  
 So dwelt the father on her face, and thought  
 'Is this Elaine ?' till back the maiden fell,  
 Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,  
 Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.  
 At last she said, 'Sweet brothers, yesternight

I seem'd a curious little maid again,  
 As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,  
 And when ye used to take me with the flood  
 Up the great river in the boatman's boat. 1030  
 Only ye would not pass beyond the cape  
 That has the poplar on it : there ye fixt  
 Your limit, oft returning with the tide.  
 And yet I cried because ye would not pass  
 Beyond it, and far up the shining flood  
 Until we found the palace of the King.  
 And yet ye would not ; but this night I dream'd  
 That I was all alone upon the flood,  
 And then I said, " Now shall I have my will :" 1040  
 And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.  
 So let me hence that I may pass at last  
 Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,  
 Until I find the palace of the King.  
 There will I enter in among them all,  
 And no man there will dare to mock at me ;  
 But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,  
 And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me ;  
 Gawain, who bad a thousand farewells to me,  
 Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bad me one : 1050  
 And there the King will know me and my love,  
 And there the Queen herself will pity me,  
 And all the gentle court will welcome me,  
 And after my long voyage I shall rest ! '

' Peace,' said her father, ' O my child, ye seem  
 Light-headed, for what force is yours to go  
 So far, being sick ? and wherefore would ye look  
 On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all ? '

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,  
 And bluster into stormy sobs and say,                   1060  
   ‘I never loved him: an I meet with him,  
   I care not howsoever great he be,  
   Then will I strike at him and strike him down,  
   Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,  
   For this discomfort he hath done the house.’

To whom the gentle sister made reply,  
   ‘Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,  
   Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot’s fault  
   Not to love me, than it is mine to love  
   Him of all men who seems to me the highest.’           1070

‘Highest?’ the father answer’d, echoing ‘highest?’  
 (He meant to break the passion in her) ‘nay,  
 Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;  
 But this I know, for all the people know it,  
 He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:  
 And she returns his love in open shame;  
 If this be high, what is it to be low?’

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:  
   ‘Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I  
   For anger: these are slanders: never yet           1080  
   Was noble man but made ignoble talk.  
   He makes no friend who never made a foe.  
   But now it is my glory to have loved  
   One peerless, without stain: so let me pass,  
   My father, howsoe’er I seem to you,  
   Not all unhappy, having loved God’s best  
   And greatest, tho’ my love had no return:  
   Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,

Thanks, but you work against your own desire ;  
 For if I could believe the things you say  
 I should but die the sooner ; wherefore cease,  
 Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man  
 Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.'

1090

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,  
 She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,  
 Besought Lavaine to write as she devised  
 A letter, word for word ; and when he ask'd  
 ' Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord ?  
 Then will I bear it gladly ; ' she replied,  
 ' For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,  
 But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote  
 The letter she devised ; which being writ  
 And folded, ' O sweet father, tender and true,  
 Deny me not,' she said — ' ye never yet  
 Denied my fancies — this, however strange,  
 My latest : lay the letter in my hand  
 A little ere I die, and close the hand  
 Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.

1100

And when the heat is gone from out my heart,  
 Then take the little bed on which I died  
 For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's  
 For richness, and me also like the Queen  
 In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.  
 And let there be prepared a chariot-bier  
 To take me to the river, and a barge  
 Be ready on the river, clothed in black.  
 I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.  
 There surely I shall speak for mine own self,  
 And none of you can speak for me so well.

1110

And therefore let our dumb old man alone  
Go with me, he can steer and row, and he  
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors.'

1120

She ceased : her father promised ; whereupon  
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death  
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.  
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh  
Her father laid the letter in her hand,  
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.  
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground, 1130  
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows  
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier  
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone  
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,  
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.  
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,  
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,  
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.  
So those two brethren from the chariot took  
And on the black decks laid her in her bed, 1140  
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung  
The silken case with braided blazonings,  
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her  
' Sister, farewell for ever,' and again  
' Farewell, sweet sister,' parted all in tears.  
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,  
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood —  
In her right hand the lily, in her left  
The letter — all her bright hair streaming down —

1140

And all the coverlid was cloth of gold  
 Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white  
 All but her face, and that clear-featured face  
 Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,  
 But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

1150

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved  
 Audience of Guinevere, to give at last  
 The price of half a realm, his costly gift,  
 Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,  
 With deaths of others, and almost his own,  
 The nine-years-fought-for diamonds : for he saw  
 One of her house, and sent him to the Queen  
 Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed  
 With such and so unmoved a majesty  
 She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,  
 Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet  
 For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye  
 The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,  
 In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,  
 And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

1160

All in an oriel on the summer side,  
 Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,  
 They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, 'Queen,  
 Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,  
 Take, what I had not won except for you,  
 These jewels, and make me happy, making them  
 An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,  
 Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's  
 Is tawnier than her cygnet's : these are words :  
 Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin

1170

In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it                            1180  
 Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words  
 Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,  
 I hear of rumors flying thro' your court.  
 Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,  
 Should have in it an absuluter trust  
 To make up that defect: let rumors be:  
 When did not rumors fly? these, as I trust  
 That you trust me in your own nobleness,  
 I may not well believe that you believe.'

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen 1190  
 Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine  
 Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,  
 Till all the place whereon she stood was green;  
 Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand  
 Received at once and laid aside the gems  
 There on a table near her, and replied:

' It may be, I am quicker of belief  
 Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.  
 Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.  
 This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,                            1200  
 It can be broken easier. I for you  
 This many a year have done despite and wrong  
 To one whom ever in my heart of hearts  
 I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?  
 Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth  
 Being your gift, had you not lost your own.  
 To loyal hearts the value of all gifts  
 Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!  
 For her! for your new fancy. Only this

Grant me, I pray you : have your joys apart.  
 I doubt not that however changed, you keep  
 So much of what is graceful : and myself  
 Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy  
 In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule :  
 So cannot speak my mind. An end to this !  
 A strange one ! yet I take it with Amen.  
 So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls ;  
 Deck her with these ; tell her, she shines me down :  
 An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's  
 Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck  
 O as much fairer — as a faith once fair  
 Was richer than these diamonds — hers not mine —  
 Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,  
 Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will —  
 She shall not have them.'

1210

1220

1230

Saying which she seized,  
 And, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,  
 Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the  
 stream.

Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,  
 Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.  
 Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain  
 At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,  
 Close underneath his eyes, and right across  
 Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge  
 Whereon the lily maid of Astolat  
 Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away  
 To weep and wail in secret ; and the barge,

On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.  
 There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom,  
 All up the marble stair, tier over tier,                   1240  
 Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd  
 'What is it?' but that oarsman's haggard face,  
 As hard and still as is the face that men  
 Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks  
 On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,  
 'He is enchanted, cannot speak — and she,  
 Look how she sleeps — the Fairy Queen, so fair!  
 Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?  
 Or come to take the King to Fairyland?  
 For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,                   1250  
 But that he passes into Fairyland.'

While thus they babbled of the King, the King  
 Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man  
 From the half-face to the full eye, and rose  
 And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.  
 So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale  
 And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;  
 And reverently they bore her into hall.  
 Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,  
 And Lancelot later came and mused at her,                   1260  
 And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:  
 But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,  
 Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

'Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,  
 I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,  
 Come, for you left me taking no farewell,  
 Hither, to take my last farewell of you.

I loved you, and my love had no return,  
 And therefore my true love has been my death.  
 And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,  
 And to all other ladies, I make moan :  
 Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.  
 Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,  
 As thou art a knight peerless.'

1270

Thus he read ;

And ever in the reading, lords and dames  
 Wept, looking often from his face who read  
 To hers which lay so silent, and at times,  
 So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,  
 Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all :  
 ' My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,  
 Know that for this most gentle maiden's death  
 Right heavy am I ; for good she was and true,  
 But loved me with a love beyond all love  
 In women, whomsoever I have known.  
 Yet to be loved makes not to love again ;  
 Not at my years, however it hold in youth.  
 I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave  
 No cause, not willingly, for such a love :  
 To this I call my friends in testimony,  
 Her brethren, and her father, who himself  
 Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,  
 To break her passion, some courtesy  
 Against my nature : what I could, I did.  
 I left her and I bad her no farewell ;  
 Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,

1280

1290

I might have put my wits to some rough use,  
And help'd her from herself.'

Then said the Queen

(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)

' Ye might at least have done her so much grace,      1300  
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death.'  
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,  
He adding :

' Queen, she would not be content  
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.  
Then might she follow me thro' the world, she ask'd ;  
It could not be. I told her that her love  
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down  
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame  
Toward one more worthy of her — then would I,  
More specially were he, she wedded, poor,      1310  
Estate them with large land and territory  
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,  
To keep them in all joyance : more than this  
I could not ; this she would not, and she died.'

He pausing, Arthur answer'd, ' O my knight,  
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,  
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,  
To see that she be buried worshipfully.'

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm  
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went      1320  
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,  
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see

The maiden buried, not as one unknown,  
 Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,  
 And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.  
 And when the knights had laid her comely head  
 Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,  
 Then Arthur spake among them, 'Let her tomb  
 Be costly, and her image thereupon,  
 And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet      1330  
 Be carven, and her lily in her hand.  
 And let the story of her dolorous voyage  
 For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb  
 In letters gold and azure ! ' which was wrought  
 Thereafter ; but when now the lords and dames  
 And people, from the high door streaming, brake  
 Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,  
 Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,  
 Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, 'Lancelot,  
 Forgive me ; mine was jealousy in love.'      1340  
 He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,  
 'That is love's curse ; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'  
 But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,  
 Approach'd him, and with full affection said,

'Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have  
 Most joy and most affiance, for I know  
 What thou hast been in battle by my side,  
 And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt  
 Strike down the lusty and long practised knight,  
 And let the younger and unskill'd go by      1350  
 To win his honor and to make his name,  
 And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man  
 Made to be loved ; but now I would to God,

Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,  
 Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,  
 By God for thee alone, and from her face,  
 If one may judge the living by the dead,  
 Delicately pure and marvellously fair,  
 Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man  
 Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons      1360  
 Born to the glory of thy name and fame,  
 My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.'

Then answer'd Lancelot : ' Fair she was, my King,  
 Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.  
 To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,  
 To doubt her pureness were to want a heart—  
 Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love  
 Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.'

' Free love, so bound, were freëst,' said the King.  
 ' Let love be free ; free love is for the best :      1370  
 And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,  
 What should be best, if not so pure a love  
 Clothed in so pure a loveliness ? yet thee  
 She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,  
 Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know.'

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,  
 And at the inrunning of a little brook  
 Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd  
 The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes  
 And saw the barge that brought her moving down, 1380  
 Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said  
 Low in himself : ' Ah simple heart and sweet,

Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love  
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?

Ay, that will I. Farewell too — now at last —

Farewell, fair lily. "Jealousy in love?"

Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?

Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,

May not your crescent fear for name and fame

Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?

1390

Why did the King dwell on my name to me?

Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,

Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake

Caught from his mother's arms — the wondrous one

Who passes thro' the vision of the night —

She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns

Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn

She kiss'd me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,

As a king's son," and often in her arms

She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.

1400

Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!

For what am I? what profits me my name

Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:

Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;

Now grown a part of me: but what use in it.

To make men worse by making my sin known?

Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?

Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man

Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break

These bonds that so defame me: not without

1410

She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,

Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,

I pray him, send a sudden Angel down

To seize me by the hair and bear me far,

And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,  
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,  
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

## THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,  
First made and latest left of all the knights,  
Told, when the man was no more than a voice  
In the white winter of his age, to those  
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,  
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,  
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King :

' I found Him in the shining of the stars,  
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,  
But in His ways with men I find Him not.  
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.  
O me ! for why is all around us here  
As if some lesser god had made the world,  
But had not force to shape it as he would,  
Till the High God behold it from beyond,  
And enter it, and make it beautiful ?  
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,  
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,  
And have not power to see it as it is : —  
Perchance, because we see not to the close ; —  
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,  
And have but stricken with the sword in vain ;  
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend  
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm

1c

20

Reels back into the beast, and is no more.  
 My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death :  
 Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.'

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,  
 There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd  
 In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown  
 Along a wandering wind, and past his ear  
 Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight !  
 Hail, King ! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.  
 Farewell ! there is an isle of rest for thee.  
 And I am blown along a wandering wind,  
 And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'  
 And fainter onward, like wild birds that change  
 Their season in the night and wail their way  
 From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream 40  
 Shrill'd ; but in going mingled with dim cries  
 Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,  
 As of some lonely city sack'd by night,  
 When all is lost, and wife and child with wail  
 Pass to new lords ; and Arthur woke and call'd,  
 'Who spake ? A dream. O light upon the wind,  
 Thine, Gawain, was the voice — are these dim cries  
 Thine ? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild  
 Mourn, knowing it will go along with me ? '

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake : 50  
 'O me, my King, let pass whatever will,  
 Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field ;  
 But in their stead thy name and glory cling  
 To all high places like a golden cloud  
 For ever : but as yet thou shalt not pass.

Light was Gawain in life, and light in death  
 Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man ;  
 And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise —  
 I hear the steps of Modred in the west,  
 And with him many of thy people, and knights      60  
 Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown  
 Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.  
 Right well in heart they know thee for the King.  
 Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
 ' Far other is this battle in the west  
 Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,  
 And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,  
 Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,  
 And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine      70  
 To war against my people and my knights.  
 The king who fights his people fights himself.  
 And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke  
 That strikes them dead is as my death to me.  
 Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way  
 Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw  
 One lying in the dust at Almesbury,  
 Hath folded in the passes of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,  
 And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,      80  
 Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse —  
 A land of old upheaven from the abyss  
 By fire, to sink into the abyss again ;  
 Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,  
 And the long mountains ended in a coast

Of ever-shifting sand, and far away  
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.  
There the pursuer could pursue no more,  
And he that fled no further fly the King ;  
And there, that day when the great light of heaven 90  
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,  
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.  
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight  
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.  
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea :  
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew  
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold  
With formless fear ; and ev'n on Arthur fell  
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.  
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist, 100  
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew ;  
And some had visions out of golden youth,  
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts  
Look in upon the battle ; and in the mist  
Was many a noble deed, many a base,  
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,  
And ever and anon with host to host  
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,  
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash  
Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks 110  
After the Christ, of those who falling down  
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist ;  
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,  
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,  
Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs  
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,  
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail  
 Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death  
 Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,  
 Save for some whisper of the seething seas,  
 A dead hush fell ; but when the dolorous day  
 Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came  
 A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew  
 The mist aside, and with that wind the tide  
 Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field  
 Of battle : but no man was moving there ;  
 Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,  
 Nor yet of heathen ; only the wan wave  
 Brake in among dead faces, to and fro      120  
 Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down  
 Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,  
 And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,  
 And rolling far along the gloomy shores  
 The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,  
 And whiter than the mist that all day long  
 Had held the field of battle was the King :

' Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,  
 And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,      140  
 And beats upon the faces of the dead,  
 My dead, as tho' they had not died for me ? —  
 O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n  
 Confusion, till I know not what I am,  
 Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.  
 Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: ‘ My King,  
 King everywhere ! and so the dead have kings,  
 There also will I worship thee as King.  
 Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live      150  
 Who love thee ; but who hates thee, he that brought  
 The heathen back among us, yonder stands,  
 Modred, unharm’d, the traitor of thine house.’

Then spake the King : ‘ My house hath been my doom.  
 But call not thou this traitor of my house  
 Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.  
 My house are rather they who sware my vows,  
 Yea, even while they brake them, own’d me King.  
 And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,  
 When all the purport of my throne hath fail’d,      160  
 That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.  
 King am I, whatsoever be their cry ;  
 And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see  
 Yet, ere I pass.’ And uttering this the King  
 Made at the man : then Modred smote his liege  
 Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword  
 Had beaten thin ; while Arthur at one blow,  
 Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,  
 Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll’d      170  
 Among the mountains by the winter sea ;  
 Until King Arthur’s Table, man by man,  
 Had fall’n in Lyonesse about their lord,  
 King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,  
 The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,

And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,  
 A broken chancel with a broken cross,  
 That stood on a dark strait of barren land :  
 On one side lay the Ocean, and on one  
 Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

180

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
 ‘ The sequel of to-day unsolders all  
 The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
 Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep  
 They sleep — the men I loved. I think that we  
 Shall never more, at any future time,  
 Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,  
 Walking about the gardens and the halls  
 Of Camelot, as in the days that were.  
 I perish by this people which I made, —  
 Tho’ Merlin sware that I should come again  
 To rule once more ; but, let what will be, be,  
 I am so deeply smitten thro’ the helm  
 That without help I cannot last till morn.  
 Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,  
 Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how  
 In those old days, one summer noon, an arm  
 Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,  
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
 Holding the sword — and how I row’d across  
 And took it, and have worn it, like a king ;  
 And, wheresoever I am sung or told  
 In aftertime, this also shall be known :  
 But now delay not : take Excalibur,  
 And fling him far into the middle mere :  
 Watch what thou seëst, and lightly bring me word.’

190

200

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 ' It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,  
 Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm—  
 A little thing may harm a wounded man ;      210  
 Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,  
 Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,  
 And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,  
 Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
 Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang  
 Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down  
 By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,  
 Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
 And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
 Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
 And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :  
 For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
 Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
 Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
 That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,  
 This way and that dividing the swift mind,  
 In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd  
 Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd      220  
 There in the many-knotted waterflags,  
 That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.  
 So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
 ' Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ?  
 What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
 And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale :      240  
 'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,  
 Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd  
 Thy fēalty, nor like a noble knight :  
 For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,  
 Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.  
 This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
 Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,  
 As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
 I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time      250  
 Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
 Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;  
 But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
 How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
 His palms together, and he cried aloud :

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
 Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,  
 Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,  
 Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.  
 What good should follow this, if this were done ?      260  
 What harm, undone ? Deep harm to disobey,  
 Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.  
 Were it well to obey then, if a king demand  
 An act unprofitable, against himself ?  
 The King is sick, and knows not what he does.  
 What record, or what relic of my lord

Should be to aftertime, but empty breath  
 And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,  
 Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,  
 Some one might show it at a joust of arms,  
 Saying, " King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,  
 Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.  
 Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps  
 Upon the hidden bases of the hills."  
 So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
 To all the people, winning reverence.  
 But now much honor and much fame were lost.'

270

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,  
 And hid Excalibur the second time,  
 And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

280

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :  
 ' What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 ' I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
 And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :  
 ' Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,  
 Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!  
 Authority forgets a dying king,  
 Laid widow'd of the power in his eye  
 That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,  
 For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,  
 In whom should meet the offices of all,  
 Thou wouldest betray me for the precious hilt;

290

Either from lust of gold, or like a girl  
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.  
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :  
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

300

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,  
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand  
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,  
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,  
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.  
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur :      31  
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.  
And lightly went the other to the King.

310

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :  
‘ Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.  
Speak out : what is it thou hast heard, or seen ? ’

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
‘Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems  
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,  
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,  
Nor tho’ I live three lives of mortal men.

320

So great a miracle as yonder hilt.  
 Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;  
 But when I look'd again, behold an arm,  
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
 That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard : 330  
 ' My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.  
 Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,  
 And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear  
 My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,  
 Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,  
 And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes  
 As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere  
 Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,  
 And would have spoken, but he found not words ; 340  
 Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,  
 O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,  
 And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,  
 Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
 When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,  
 Muttering and murmuring at his ear, ' Quick, quick !  
 I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'  
 But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,  
 Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd, 350  
 Larger than human on the frozen hills.  
 He heard the deep behind him, and a cry

Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.  
 Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves  
 And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
 The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
 Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels —  
 And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake,  
 And the long glories of the winter moon !

36c

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
 Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
 Beneath them ; and descending they were ware  
 That all the decks were dense with stately forms,  
 Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream — by these  
 Three Queens with crowns of gold : and from them rose  
 A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,  
 And, as it were one voice, an agony  
 Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills  
 All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
 Or hath come, since the making of the world.

37o

Then murmur'd Arthur, ' Place me in the barge.'  
 So to the barge they came. There those three Queens  
 Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.  
 But she, that rose the tallest of them all  
 And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
 And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,  
 And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,  
 And dropping bitter tears against a brow  
 Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white 38o  
 And colorless, and like the wither'd moon  
 mote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;

And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops  
 Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls —  
 That made his forehead like a rising sun  
 High from the daïs-throne — were parch'd with dust ;  
 Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
 Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.  
 So like a shatter'd column lay the King ;  
 Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,      390  
 From spur to plume a star of tournament,  
 Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged  
 Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 ' Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?  
 Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?  
 For now I see the true old times are dead,  
 When every morning brought a noble chance,  
 And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
 Such times have been not since the light that led      400  
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
 But now the whole Round Table is dissolved  
 Which was an image of the mighty world,  
 And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
 And the days darken round me, and the years,  
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge :  
 ' The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
 And God fulfils himself in many ways,  
 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.      410  
 Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?  
 I have lived my life, and that which I have done

May He within himself make pure ! but thou,  
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
 For what are men better than sheep or goats  
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer      420  
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?  
 For so the whole round earth is every way  
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
 But now farewell. I am going a long way  
 With these thou seëst — if indeed I go  
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt) —  
 To the island-valley of Avilion ;  
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
 Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies  
 Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns      430  
 And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
 Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail  
 Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan  
 That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,  
 Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
 With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
 Revolving many memories, till the hull  
 Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
 And on the mere the wailing died away.      440

But when that moan had past for evermore,  
 The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn

Amazed him, and he groan'd, 'The King is gone.'  
 And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,  
 ' From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb  
 The last hard footstep of that iron crag ;  
 Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,  
 ' He passes to be King among the dead,  
 And after healing of his grievous wound      450  
 He comes again ; but — if he come no more —  
 O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,  
 Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed  
 On that high day, when, clothed with living light,  
 They stood before his throne in silence, friends  
 Of Arthur, who should help him at his need ? '

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint  
 As from beyond the limit of the world,  
 Like the last echo born of a great cry,  
 Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice      460  
 Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb  
 Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,  
 Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,  
 Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,  
 Down that long water opening on the deep  
 Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go  
 From less to less and vanish into light.  
 And the new sun rose bringing the new year.



A HYPOTHETICAL MAP OF THE SCENE OF THE "IDYLLS OF THE KING."

— In *Lancelot and Elaine* Camelot is placed near London. In *Gareth and Lynyson* the city is on a mount, perhaps in Somerset. As in the case of nearly all the *Idylls* the author did not care to locate it definitely.

## NOTES

### THE COMING OF ARTHUR

1. **Cameliard.** For this region, supposed by some critics to be Scotland, see the map.

5. **Many a petty king.** According to the fanciful history of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur was the ninetieth king of Britain. English literature has made us familiar with some of these "petty kings." Locrine and his daughter Sabrina are mentioned in Milton's *Comus*. Shakespeare has made Lear and his three daughters well known. Cymbeline, Cassibelanus, Guiderius, and Arviragus are mentioned in *Cymbeline*. Ferrex and Porrex, the sons of Gorboduc, form the subject of a drama attributed to Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, *Gorboduc*, or *Ferrex and Porrex* (1561).

8. **Heathen host.** The Saxons, whose emblem was the White Horse. See *Lancelot and Elaine*, 297.

13-14. **Aurelius . . . Uther.** Aurelius Ambrosius (called by the Celtic form of the name, Emrys, in *Gareth and Lynette*, 367). He opposed the Jutes, but was defeated, and poisoned. His brother Uther succeeded him and defeated the Saxons in several battles; but he, too, was poisoned, and was in turn succeeded by Arthur.

17. **Table Round.** King Arthur's Order of Knighthood; so called because all the knights, one hundred and fifty in number, sat at one great round table—"an image of the mighty world"—*The Passing of Arthur*, 402-403. The table itself was given to Arthur by Leodogran, as part of Guinevere's dowry.

26. **The wolf would steal.** Compare the story of Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome.

A fascinating story of a "wolf-child," Mowgli, turning upon incidents such as those mentioned in these lines, will be found in Kipling's first and second *Jungle Books*.

34. **Groaned for the Roman legions.** "Probably a reference to the famous 'groans of the Britons' of Gildas, who says that the Britons wrote to the Roman senate that 'the barbarians drive us into the sea ; the sea throws us back on the barbarians ; thus two modes of death await us, we are either slain or drowned.'”—**LITTLEDALE.**

36. **Urien.** In the first edition of this Idyll, Tennyson called him Rience. "King Rience of North Wales made great war upon King Leodegrance of Camelopard."—**MALORY**, I, xv.

50. **The golden symbol.** For a description of his "symbol," see *Lancelot and Elaine*, 432 ff.

59. **Beast.** A collective term for the animals mentioned in line 23.

72. **Gorlois** (pronounced Górlóis). The Duke of Tintagil, the first husband of Arthur's mother. See 184-220.

73. **Anton.** His wife reared the child Arthur. See 220-224.

75. **Travail . . . life.** The new love makes him experience, as it were, a new birth.

84. **Saving.** Unless.

94. **He.** Malory.

99. **High day.** Noon.

102. **Clarions . . . blood.** Horns calling to battle.

103. **Battle.** Battalion.

106. **Powers . . . world.** Divinities who take part in human affairs.

110. **Threw.** Overthrew.

111-115. **Carádos . . . Orkney.** These kings are mentioned in Malory, Book I, Chaps. vi, xiv, xv. Nothing definite is known about them.

115. **Voice.** Compare the shouting of Achilles in the *Iliad*, Book XVIII, 220 ff. Tennyson has translated the passage in *Achilles over the Trench*.

119. **Brands.** Swords.

121-122. **So like a painted . . . silenced.** Compare Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner*, 117-118:

"As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean."

124-125. His warrior whom he loved and honor'd most.

**Lancelot.**

127. **Liege.** Lord.

130. **Warded.** Guarded.

132. Compare *Lancelot and Elaine*, 143-144.

142. **Saving.** Except.

150. **Merlin.** The great Magician of the Arthur legend. See Introduction, p. xxii.

153-154. **Ran before.** Surpassed.

157. **Annal-book.** A chronicle.

160-162. **O friend . . . share of me.** That is, if I had been helped as little by Arthur as by thee, "beast and man" would have overcome me.

166. **Cuckoo chased.** The cuckoos attempt to drive away the rightful owners of the nest, and are therefore chased with "reason," i.e. rightly.

212. **Postern-gate.** A back gate.

252. **Body enow.** Forces enough.

257. **Dais.** The raised platform at the upper end of the room, on which the leader or ruler sat.

261. **Strait.** Strict.

274. **Vert.** Green.

275. **Three fair queens.** Compare *Gareth and Lynette*, 225-226, and *The Passing of Arthur*, 365-366, 373-380, and 452-456.

279. **Mage.** Magician.

282. **Lady of the Lake.** See *Gareth and Lynette*, 210-224; and *The Passing of Arthur*, 311-314 and 326-329.

284. **Samite.** A rich silken material.

285. **Cross-hilted sword.** As the hilt was cross-shaped, the sword was frequently used in administering oaths. Thus it was a sacred symbol.

288. **Minster gloom.** The darkness of the church—the "dim, religious light" of which Milton speaks. *Il Penseroso*, 160.

294. **Excalibur** (pronounced Ex kál i bur). Arthur's famous sword, which arose from the lake and was cast back into it when he was dying. See *The Passing of Arthur*, 301-315.

**298. Urim.** "Sparkling ornaments worn anciently by the Jewish High Priest when giving oracular responses." — LITTLEDALE. See Exodus xxviii : 15-30.

**301. Oldest tongue.** Hebrew.

**318. Pass.** Go out.

**Let them be.** Leave Leodogran and her alone.

**322. Modred.** He is the villain of the Idylls; and from the very first Tennyson presents him in an unpleasant light. Here he plays the eavesdropper, and all his other acts are in keeping with this.

**342. Heath.** Heather.

**360. Cry.** Summons.

**362. Changeling.** An ill-favored child left by the fairies in the place of a beautiful one whom they have stolen away.

**368. Still.** Still in death.

**379. A ninth one.** "The Welsh bards allude frequently to this wave, which comes with more force than do the others." — LITTLEDALE.

**391. Free.** Clear.

**392. Part.** Depart.

**393. Seer.** Prophet.

**394. Strait.** Narrow.

**401. Riddling triplets.** Triplets with a double meaning. See note to *Gareth and Lynette*, 280. *Triplets* are three lines rhyming together.

**410.** Compare *The Passing of Arthur*, 445.

**431. Hind.** Peasant.

**432. Rick.** A stack of hay or grain.

**440. With a wink.** In a moment.

**452. Dubric.** According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, he was primate of Britain. He was a very holy man and had the power of curing diseases by his prayers.

**454. Stateliest of her altar-shrines.** Possibly Westminster Abbey. Malory states that the marriage took place at St. Stephen's at Camelot, a place "nigh unto London."

**466. Doom.** Fate, fortune.

**472. Other.** Better.

**481-501.** Note this noble martial song, with its stirring refrain.

505. **Tribute.** A tax paid for protection.  
 508. This line is repeated in *The Passing of Arthur*, 408.  
 517. **Twelve great battles.** Lancelot enumerates these battles in *Lancelot and Elaine*, 284-302.

### GARETH AND LYNETTE

1. **Lot and Bellicent.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 115, 188-191, 242-244, 319, 322.  
 2. **Gareth.** He was the nephew of Arthur, since his mother, Bellicent, was, like Arthur, the child of Ygerne.  
 3. **Spate.** Flood.  
 17. **Would I.** Would I wish.  
 18. **Yield.** Reward.  
 22. **The great Sun of Glory.** King Arthur.  
 23-25. **Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,**  
       . . . working out his will,  
       To cleanse the world.

- Note the alliteration here. It is very frequent in these Idylls.  
 25-26. **Gawain . . . Modred.** Gareth's brothers.  
 37. **An.** If. Note this meaning, as the word is used frequently.  
 40. **Goose and golden eggs.** For a humorous form of this familiar story, see Tennyson's poem, *The Goose*.  
 46. **Book of Hours.** A book of prayers for stated hours of the day. These manuscript books were often elaborately ornamented with gilded and colored initials.  
 51. **Were I.** I should be.  
**Leash.** Three. Hunting dogs were held in a leash, or line, usually in threes; hence the word means three.  
 56. **Clomb.** Climbed. One of the many archaic forms used in the Idylls.  
**Brake.** Broke.  
 59. **Had.** Would have.  
 66. **Brand Excalibur.** King Arthur's sword. Swords were frequently given names in the old romances. See *The Coming of Arthur*, 294-304.  
 76. **The Barons' war.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 62-115.  
 87. **An often chance.** Notice that *often* is here an adjective.

90. **Burns.** Streams.

105. **Good lack.** A mild oath.

107. **Save.** Unless.

116-118. **Follow the Christ,** etc. These lines represent the ideals of the Round Table. See *Guinevere*, 465-474. Quoted in the Introduction, pages xiv. and xv.

122. **Frequent with.** Habitually, or constantly, with. (Lat. *frequens*.)

128. **Cloud that settles round his birth.** For the doubts about King Arthur's origin, see *The Coming of Arthur*, 177-236, and 316-385.

131. **Yield.** Grant.

133-134. **Who swept . . . free.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 502-518.

146. **So.** If only.

151. **Knaves.** Servants.

152. **Bar.** The board across which food was passed from kitchen to dining hall.

157. **Villain.** Slavish.

162. **Thrall.** A servant.

176. **Still.** Always.

178-183. These beautiful lines should be memorized. They set the keynote, so to speak, of the whole Idyll. It is the joyous springtime of the year and the springtime of life.

184-193. **So . . . disappeared.** King Arthur's capital.

"On the latest limit of the West in the land of Lyonesse, where, save the rocky Isles of Scilly, all is now wild sea, rose the sacred Mount of Camelot. It rose from the deeps with gardens and bowers and palaces, and at the top of the Mount was King Arthur's hall, and the holy Minster, with the Cross of gold. Here dwelt the King in glory apart, while the Saxons whom he had overthrown in twelve battles ravaged the land, and ever came nearer and nearer. The Mount was the most beautiful in the world, sometimes green and fresh in the beam of morning, sometimes all one splendor, folded in the golden mists of the West. But all underneath it was hollow, and the mountain trembled, when the seas rushed bellowing through the porphyry caves; and there ran a prophecy that the mountain and the city on some wild morning would topple

into the abyss and be no more." — A prose fragment by Tennyson, quoted in the *Memoir*, II, 122-123.

200. **Changeling.** See the note on *The Coming of Arthur*, 362.

202. **Merlin.** The famous magician of the Idylls. See *The Coming of Arthur*, 279-281.

**Glamour.** Magic, enchantment.

209-226. This gate is symbolical of society; *The Lady of the Lake* is Religion. See *The Coming of Arthur*, 282-293. Her sword is justice. The sacred fish represents the name of Christ. The Greek word for fish is ΙΧΘΥΣ, and is formed from the initial letters of the words Ιησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Τίλος Σωτήρ; that is, in English, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour.

229. **Boughts.** Coils.

248. **Playing on him.** Making sport of him.

256-258. Compare the stories of the building of the walls about Thebes and Troy. See Tennyson's *Oenone*, 39-40:

"—as yonder walls  
Rose slowly to a music slowly breathed."

280. **Riddling of the Bards.** The bards, or poets, were supposed to have the gift of prophecy, and they presented their prophecies in ambiguous terms, *i.e.* in riddlings. See examples of "riddling triplets" in *The Coming of Arthur*, 402-410.

287. **Brook.** Endure.

293. **Not she, nor I.** "Not her, nor me," is more in accord with ordinary usage.

298. **Did their days in stone.** Carved their deeds in stone.

314. **Doom.** Judgment.

317. **Doom.** Condemn.

333. **Whether.** Which of the two.

339. **Say.** Report.

340. **Who.** He who.

348. **Held with.** Sided with.

351. **Standeth seized of.** Has possession of.

355. **Wreak.** Avenge.

359. **Seneschal.** Steward.

362. **Gyve and gag.** Littledale interprets the phrase thus: "In old times scolding women were sometimes tied in a chair

called the ‘cucking-stool,’ and an iron muzzle (called a ‘branks’ or ‘gossip’s bridle’) was fastened on their heads.”

366. **Had.** Would have.

367. **Aurelius Emrys.** See the note on *The Coming of Arthur*, 13-14. He was the brother of Uther, and his predecessor on the throne.

380. **Charlock.** Wild mustard.

383. **Delivering.** Announcing.

386. **His goodly cousin Tristram.** Tristram of Lyonesse, the nephew of King Mark of Cornwall. *Cousin* is here used in the general sense of “kinsman.”

398. **Blazoned.** Painted in the heraldic colors proper to the shield.

411. **Reave.** Deprive.

419. **Churl.** Peasant.

422. **Lap him up in cloth of lead.** “An allusion to the old custom of using sheet lead for winding round corpses.” — LITTLEDALE.

442. **Thine.** That is, thy master.

444. **Wan-sallow.** Pale and colorless.

447. **Wot.** Knows. **Brewis.** Broth.

454. **Fluent.** Flowing.

457. **Or . . . hall.** That is, whether of low or of high birth.

459. **To shame thy judging.** Cause thee to be ashamed of thy judgment.

461. There is a special significance in Kay’s mentioning poison, for Arthur’s uncle and father had both been poisoned. See the note on *The Coming of Arthur*, 13-14.

465. **Sir Fair-Hands.** Malory calls him Beaumains, the French equivalent of Fair-Hands.

474. **Hustle and harry.** Shove about roughly and harass.

**Labor.** To make work. The verb is transitive.

476. **Broach.** The spit to which the meat was fastened to roast before the open fire.

487-493. These lines give yet another account of Arthur’s origin. Two were given in *The Coming of Arthur*.

489. **Tarns.** Mountain lakes.

490. **Caer-Eryri** (pronounced kĕr erȳ’ri). Snowdon Field in Wales.

**492. Isle Avilion.** The "Isle of Apples," the paradise of the ancient Celts. Avilion is supposed to be near Glastonbury. See map.

**496. Roundelay.** A song or tune in which the first strain is repeated.

**507. So. If.**

**519. That is, at full moon.**

**528. That is, from torment to joy.** *St. Peter* keeps the keys of Heaven.

**542. Utter hardihood.** Perfect courage.

**571. Lions on thy shield.** Lancelot's heraldic device, by which he would be known.

**584. Loneliest hold.** The most solitary stronghold.

**586. Best blood.** The sacramental wine.

**603. Purport.** Purpose. See *The Passing of Arthur*, 160.

**606-607. Wed . . . a holy life.** Become a nun.

**616. From the moment.** From moment to moment, as their caprice directed.

**642. May-white.** Compare "a brow May-blossom," 574-575.

**646. Lane of access.** Between the rows of knights who guarded the king.

**651. Gave upon.** Looked upon. (Like the French phrase, *donner sur.*)

**657. Counter to.** Opposite.

**665-666.** That is, one knight (out of the North) bore a blank shield and a helmet; the other held the horse and the spear. For the *maiden shield*, see lines 396-410.

**673. Harness.** Armor.

**675. Helm.** Helmet.

**678. Trenchant.** Sharp, keen.

**687-689. Ere his cause . . . owner.** The cur follows his master when called, though his cause has not been vindicated by a fight to the finish.

**692. Harry and hustle.** See note to line 474.

**693. Hath past his time.** "Is in his dotage, is become imbecile."—LITTLEDALE.

**729. Foul-fleshed agaric in the holt.** An ill-smelling mushroom in the wood.

**731. Shrew.** Shrew-mouse.

740. **Shoulder-slipt.** With shoulder dislocated. See line 1182.
742. **Shingle.** Round, water-worn, and loose gravel and pebbles.
746. **Fellowship.** Company.
749. **Unhappiness.** Mischance, accident.
751. **Loon.** Worthless fellow, fool.
755. **Fair.** Noble.
766. **Beknaved.** Called knave.
771. **Spit.** Sword. A sarcastic reference to his kitchen service.
773. **Evensong.** Vespers.
778. **Mere.** A small lake.
785. **Straitlier.** More strictly.
791. **Haling.** Hauling.
799. **Caitiff.** Base.
802. **Vermin.** Any small animals and birds that cause damage.
804. **Wan.** Gloomy.
806. **Grimly.** Grim, hideous.
809. **Worshipfully.** Worthily.
813. **Harborage.** Shelter.
828. **Cate.** Dainty. (Compare "caterer.")
829. **Peacock in his pride.** "At table peacocks were never introduced, except on the most important and magnificent occasions . . . and before [them], . . . at the most splendid feasts, all the guests, male and female, took a solemn vow: the knights vowing bravery and the ladies engaging to be loving and faithful." — STANLEY'S *History of Birds*. Hence, as Littledale explains, Lynette is to be reminded by "the peacock in his pride" that ladies should be loving and gentle to their champions — a lesson of which she stands somewhat in need.
839. **Frontless.** Lacking in shame or modesty.
862. **Avail.** Benefit.
871. **Stoat.** The ermine.
873. **Ruth.** Pity.
881. **Hers.** Cinderella's.
889. **Lent-lily in hue.** Yellow like the lent-lily, or daffodil.
908. **Avanturine.** A variety of quartz rock containing spangles of mica or quartz.
922. **Liefer.** Rather.

923. **Missay.** Slander.
934. **Lightly.** Quickly.
935. **Avoid.** Withdraw. **Beseemeth.** Befits.
939. **The central bridge.** The centre of the bridge.
948. **Grovelling.** Prostrate.
951. **As a grace.** As a favor.
1002. **Flower,** etc. The dandelion.
1008. **Brother.** Gareth has the shield of the Morning-Star and is mistaken by the Noon-Sun for his brother.
- Marches.** Boundaries, domain.
1012. **Vizoring up.** Covering with the vizor or front part of the helmet.
1013. **Cipher.** Round and meaningless like the cipher or zero.
1048. **The boar hath rosemaries and bay.** The boar's head was garnished with evergreen (rosemary) and laurel (bay).
1052. **Mavis.** A song thrush. **Merle.** A blackbird.
1060. **Of treble bow.** Having three arches.
1072. **Ward.** Place of guard.
1094. **Drawn.** With sword drawn.
1097. **Vaulted up.** Sprang into the saddle.
1099. **Foredooming.** Foreboding, fearing.
- 1116-1119. Note this fine simile of the buoy on the waves.
1117. **Southwesterns.** Southwest winds. **Ridge.** Wave.
1130. **Trefoil.** Clover.
1141. **Mazed my wit.** Bewildered, confounded my mind.
1143. **Mistrusted.** Feared.
1144. **Handle scorn.** Be scornful. **Yield.** Give.
1145. **Cope.** Cope with, undertake.
1155. **Hern.** Heron. Note the accurate description in these lines.
1163. **Comb.** The head of a valley, *i.e.* that part which extends above the most elevated spring.
1172. **Vexillary.** A standard-bearer.
1173. **Gelt.** A small stream in Cumberland. See map.
- 1174-1175. **Phosphorus.** Morning star. **Meridies.** Midday. **Hesperus.** Evening-star. **Nox.** Night. **Mors.** Death.
1181. **One.** Lancelot.
1182. **Dislocated.** See note on line 740.
1184. **Headlong error.** Headlong flight.

1189. **Felon knight.** Lancelot thinks that he is speaking to Morning-Star.

**Friend.** Gareth, who he thinks has been slain by Morning-Star.

1190. That is, Gareth answered Lancelot's shout and pricked (spurred) his horse forward to meet him.

1253. **Rated at.** Scolded.

1273. **Ramp.** Spring, climb.

1278. **Virtue.** Strength, courage.

1281. **Arthur's Harp.** The constellation of the Great Bear, or Dipper.

1283. **Liege.** Lord.

1293. **Flung.** Unhorsed.

1314. **Devisings.** Rules, devices.

1318. **Instant.** Earnest.

1324. **Palling.** Covering as with a pall, darkening.

1346-1347. With this compare the horse in Browning's *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*.

1348. **Fleshless laughter.** A skull.

1362. **Prickled.** His hair stood on end with terror.

1372. **Throughly.** An archaic form of thoroughly.

1377. **Stay the world from.** Keep the world, or people, from.

1392. **He.** Malory.

1394. **He.** Tennyson.

## LANCELOT AND ELAINE

"This is perhaps the most *idyllic* of the Idylls—and it is in some respects the most touching, as a picture of Elaine's love, 'that never found its mortal close,' and Lancelot's great and guilty passion, that 'marred his face and marked it ere his time.' Tennyson's power of drawing the characters of simple and lovable women is here seen to perfection. It is easy enough to represent a woman in whom the elements of good and evil are mingled, or in whom the latter predominate,—such a character is in no danger of being too neutral-tinted or monotonous; but it is a far harder task to depict women like Enid and Elaine, fair and lovable beings, with all the charm of purity and goodness, but moving steadfastly within the

orbit of homely simplicities, and lacking the effect of deviation, the contrast of light and shade, that we see in the lives of less clear-natured women. In delineating these gracious creatures Tennyson stands unrivalled; and in his rare sympathy with such types of womanly purity we may perceive the almost feminine delicacy of his mind." — LITTLEDALE.

- 7. **Soilure.** Tarnish.
- 8. **Braided.** Embroidered.
- 10. **Tinct.** Color, tint. For a description of the shield, see lines 658–660.
- 27. **Fantasy.** Fancies.
- 35. **Lyonnesse.** See the map, and the quotation from Tennyson in the note on lines 184–193 of *Gareth and Lynette*.
- 36. **Tarn.** A mountain lake.
- 46. **Aside.** On each side.
- 53. **Shingly scaur.** A steep cliff covered with water-worn pebbles.
- 75–76. **Place . . . hugest.** London.
- 76. **Let.** Ordered to. (The French *faire*.)
- 91. **Tale.** Number.
- 94. **Lets . . . from.** Hinders from.
- 110. **Allow'd.** Acknowledged.
- 118. **Devoir.** Duty.
- 125. **Untruth.** Unfaithfulness.
- 138. **Vermin voices.** Voices that spread evil reports.
- 252. **A living soul.** His soul, or conscience, was not yet dead.
- 253. **Goodliest.** Most handsome.
- 263. **A smaller time.** Our own day, when less noble men live.
- 269. **Glanced at.** Spoke of.
- 270. **The wordless man.** The dumb porter.
- 280. **Rapt.** Transported, carried away.
- 293. **Cuirass.** Breastplate.
- Our Lady's Head.** The head of the Virgin Mary.
- 295. **Lighten'd.** Flashed.
- 297. **White Horse.** The Saxon invaders, whose emblem was the White Horse.
- 330–335. "He once asked Mr. Watts to describe his ideal of what a true portrait painter should be, and he embalmed the sub-

stance of Mr. Watts' reply in some of the noblest lines in the Idylls."—*Memoirs*, Vol. II, page 205. These words refer to lines 330-335.

- 338. **Rathe.** Early.
- 342. **Anon.** Soon.
- 356. **Favor.** Token of love.
- 357. **Braved.** Overmastered.
- 422. **Pendragon.** The other name of Uther, the father of Arthur. He was probably so called because the dragon was his emblem. Here it refers to Arthur, who succeeded to his father's title. See lines 430-436.
- 423. **Mysteriously.** Concerning the mystery of Arthur's birth.
- 425. **I had seen.** That is, "I had seen that which I had most desired to see — King Arthur."
- 442. **Nameless king.** See lines 45-46.
- 446. **Crescent.** Growing, developing.
- 453. **Held the lists.** Were on the defensive.
- 459. **Bode.** Waited.
- 477-488. Note this fine simile. Some of Tennyson's best lines are descriptive of the sea.
- 552. **Mid might.** The height of his strength.
- Flourish.** Flower.
- 567. **Tarriance.** Delay.
- 583-585. See lines 151-153. These are the Queen's own words, which she now imputes to Lancelot.
- 643-644. **Free . . . above her.** She was not accustomed to courtly wit, and did not understand it.
- 653. **Slipt her at.** Let her loose to pursue.
- 715. **Strokes of the blood.** Pulse-beats.
- 717. **Shook his hair.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 319-321.
- 724. **Predoomed.** Judged beforehand.
- 728. **Marred her friend's aim.** The Queen did not receive "the sharp news" with the expected astonishment.
- 761. **Gentler-born.** More noble in birth.
- 764. **Token.** The same as *favor*, line 356.
- 773. **Her suit allowed.** Her request having been granted.
- 798. **His own far blood.** His own kin, not closely related to him.

**807. Battle-writhen.** The muscles were developed by warfare, so that they had the appearance of being woven into knots.

**870. Straiten'd.** Restrained, bound.

**871-872. His honor . . . true.** These fine epigrammatic lines sum up the whole tragedy.

**877. One face.** Guinevere's.

**880. Ghostly grace.** The beauty of Guinevere which he sees in imagination.

**883. Rough sickness.** That period of his sickness when he was discourteous. See lines 848-850.

**898. Burthen.** The refrain of a song.

**905. Victim's flowers.** The animal to be sacrificed was usually decorated with garlands of flowers.

**923. That I live . . . is yours.** It is due to you that I live. See line 858.

**939. Quit.** Requite, repay.

**953. My realm beyond the seas.** In the province called Brittany, in France. See the map.

**969. That were against me.** That would be hard for him, because the Knights were pledged to courtesy.

**977. By tact of love.** By the delicate perception which love gave her.

**995. Sallow-rifted.** The dusk of evening rifted, or broken, by pale light.

**1015. The Phantom of the house.** This is the Ben-Shie, or "banshee," mentioned by Scott in *Marmion*, III, 168,— "The fatal Ben-Shie's boding scream." The "banshee," or "Phantom," was a domestic spirit who gave warning of any disaster to the family to which it was attached.

**1056. Force.** Power, strength.

**1092. Ghostly man.** Priest, spiritual man.

**1129. Dole.** Grief.

**1131. Bent.** Downcast, that is, in grief.

**1170. Oriel.** A window built out from a wall.

**Summerside.** Southern side.

**1178. Tawnier . . . cygnet's.** More yellowish than the young swan's. These are words. That is, these are mere words, and can give no idea of your beauty.

1217. **Add my diamonds to her pearls.** The pearls were Elaine's "favor." See lines 601-602.
1265. **Sometime.** Formerly.
1287. **However it hold.** However it may hold true in youth.
1316. **Worship.** Honor.
1318. **Worshipfully.** Honorably.
- 1319-1320. **Shrine . . . richest.** Westminster Abbey.
1346. **Affiance.** Confidence.
1354. **Homeless trouble.** The look of trouble, or care, through his being a lonely or homeless man. See the lines immediately following.
1365. **Want an eye.** To be blind.
1399. **King's son.** According to Malory, Book IV, Chap. i, Lancelot was the son of King Ban of Benwick in Brittany.
1410. **Without.** Unless.
1418. **Not knowing he should die a holy man.** Lancelot repented later, and became a monk, as is told in Malory, Book XXI, Chap. x. See Introduction, p. xxvi.

#### THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

1. **Sir Bedivere.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 173.
28. **I pass, but shall not die.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 418-421.
35. **Isle of rest.** "The island-valley of Avilion," line 427.
52. **Harmless glamour.** This refers to the "dim cries" heard by the king.
62. **Spitting at.** Despising.
- 68-69. See *The Coming of Arthur*, 110-115, and 511-513.
77. **One . . . Almesbury.** Guinevere, who fled to the nunnery at Almesbury, in Wiltshire. (See map.) When Arthur followed her there, she "grovelled with her face against the floor."—*Guinevere*, 412.
78. **Folded in the passes.** Enveloped the roads, or ways.
117. **Voices of the dead.** The echoes of their dying cries.
155. **Of my house.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 317-324.
161. **Quick.** Living.
- 170-440. These lines were the earliest written of all the *Idylls*

of the King, having been published in 1842, under the title *Morte D'Arthur*. They were made a part of *The Passing of Arthur* in 1870. In the collected works they still also appear as a separate poem—on page 68 of the one-volume edition.

177. **Chancel.** “The eastern and most sacred portion of a church.”—ROWE.

180. **Water.** Lake.

182. **Unsolders.** Dissolves.

208. **Meet.** Becoming, proper.

211. **Hest.** Command.

224. **Haft.** Hilt.

231. **Water-flags.** Water plants with broad, sword-shaped leaves.

232. **Marge.** Margin, shore.

243. **Fealty.** Fidelity of an inferior to a lord.

248. **Lief.** Beloved. Dear. Precious.

254. **Chased.** Engraved.

257. **Worthy note.** Worthy of note.

278. **Clouded with his own conceit.** Confused with his own thoughts.

293. **Offices.** Duties.

295. **Lust.** Love, desire.

297. **For.** Since, because.

305. **Made lightnings.** With the flashings of its blade and the jewels in the hilt.

307. **A streamer of the northern morn.** The aurora borealis, or northern lights.

308. **Moving isles of winter.** Icebergs.

315. **The other.** Bedivere.

325. **Wheeling.** Whirling.

337. **Blue eyes.** The king was fair in complexion. See line 384 and *The Coming of Arthur*, 329.

349–360. These lines are perhaps the finest that Tennyson ever wrote for expressive harmony. They should be committed to memory.

351. The same phenomenon has been noticed by Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book VIII:

“In size a giant, stalking through thick fog.”

366. **Three Queens.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 275-278, and *Gareth and Lynette*, 225.

367. **Shivered.** "Thrilled, vibrated." — LITTLEDALE.

383. **Greaves.** Armor for the front of the lower part of the legs.  
**Cuisses.** Armor for the front of the thighs.

**Dashed with drops of onset.** Spattered with blood in the onset, or battle.

398. **Noble chance.** An opportunity to perform a noble deed.

401. **Holy Elders.** The Magi. See Matthew ii: 11-12.

403. **An image of the mighty world.** Malory says (*Morte d'Arthur*, XIV, Chap. ii): "Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right."

408. This line is quoted from *The Coming of Arthur*, 508.

425. **These.** The three Queens of line 366.

435. **Fluting a wild carol ere her death.** "Sir Thomas Browne in his *Vulgar Errors* . . . says: 'From great antiquity and before the melody of Syrens, the musical note of swans hath been commended, and they sing most sweetly before their death.'"

— Quoted by Littledale from DYER'S *English Folklore*.

445. **From the great deep to the great deep.** Compare *The Coming of Arthur*, 410.

453-456. **The three . . . at his need?** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 275-278.

469. The "old order" has passed away, and the new comes in with the new year's sun.

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